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A Complete Arctic Novel

ARGOSY

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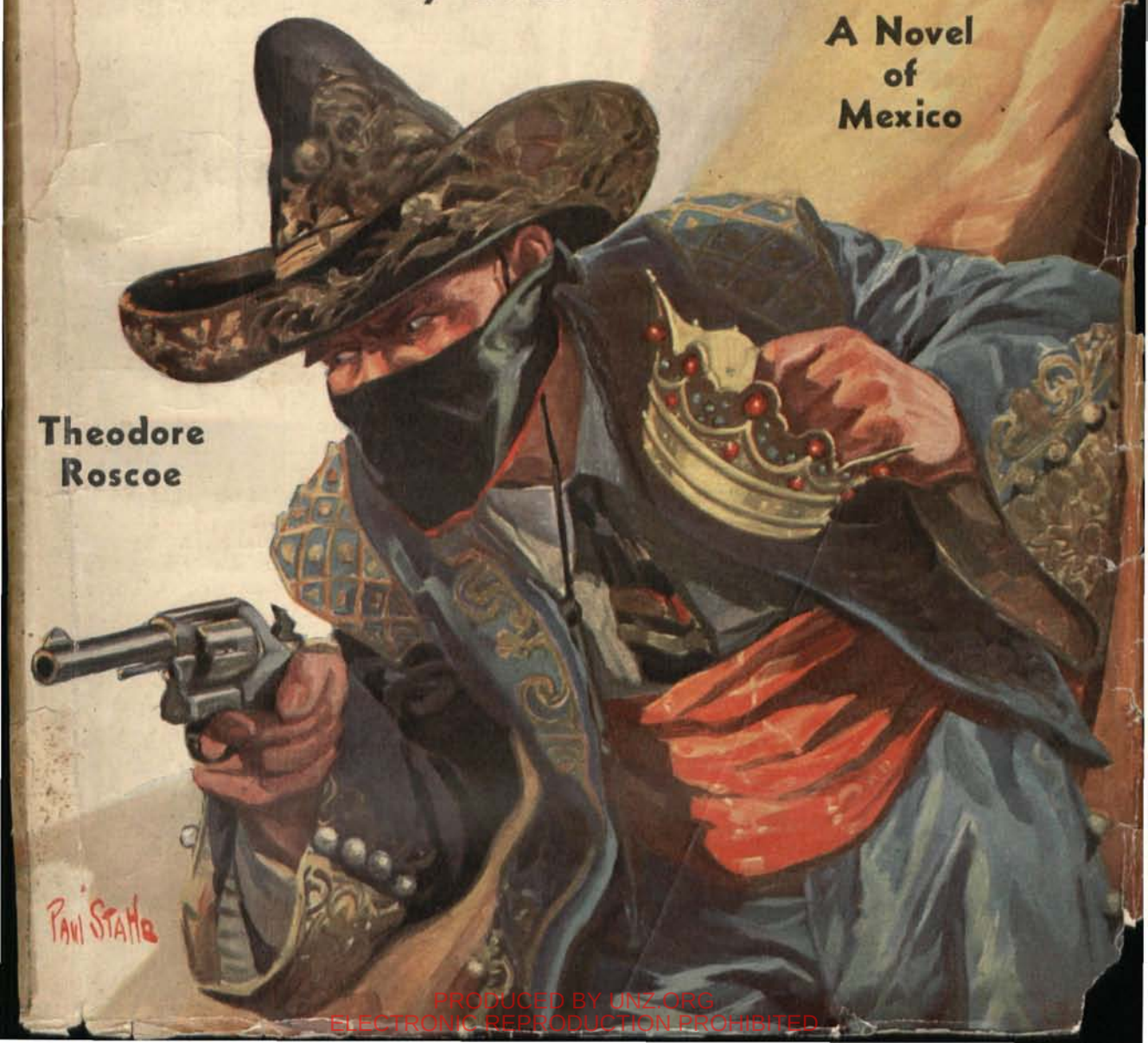
APR. 28 WEEKLY

Montana Rides Again

By Evan Evans

A Novel of Mexico

Theodore Roscoe



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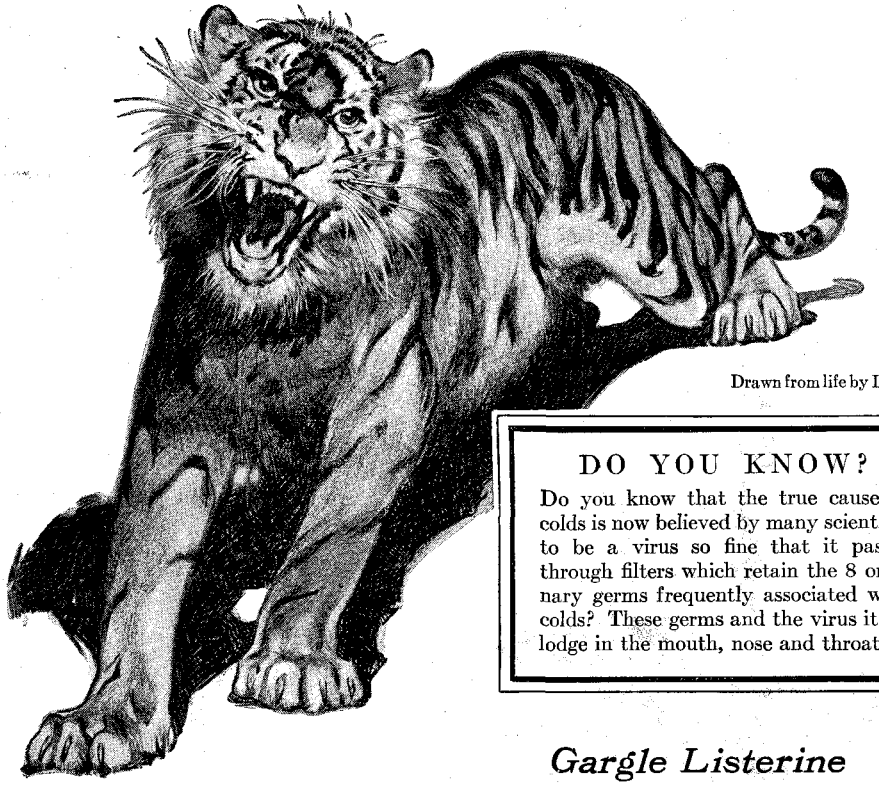
The TIGER *in the* House



Drawn from life by Dan Smith

DO YOU KNOW?

Do you know that the true cause of colds is now believed by many scientists to be a virus so fine that it passes through filters which retain the 8 ordinary germs frequently associated with colds? These germs and the virus itself lodge in the mouth, nose and throat.

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ARGOSY

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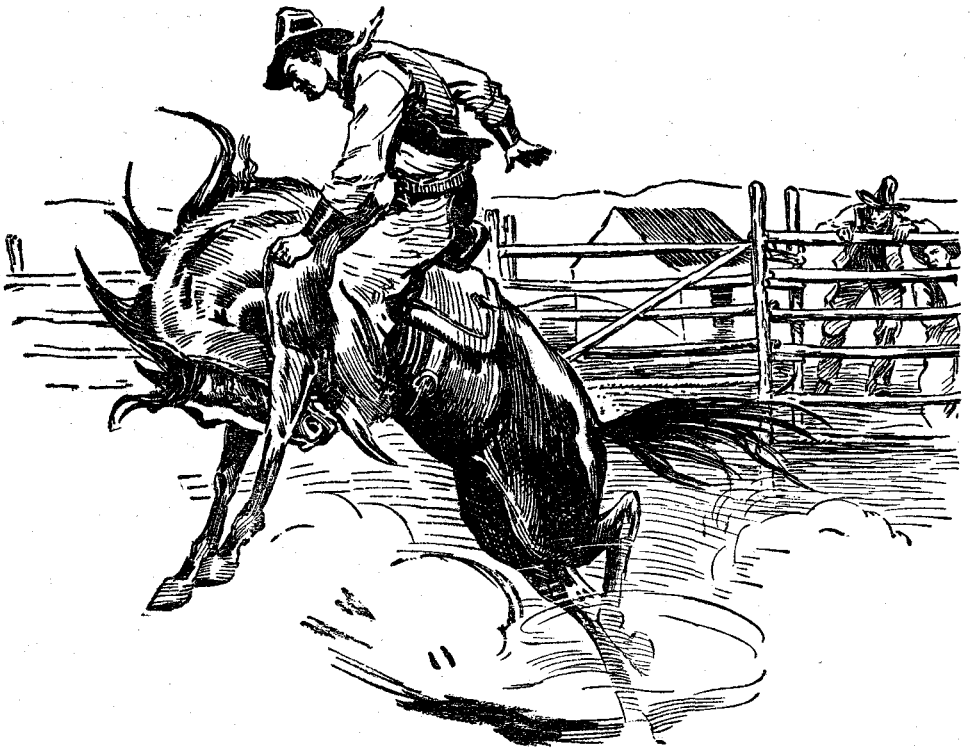

This was no riding contest; there was death in the air

Montana Rides Again

By EVAN EVANS

Adventurous Kid Montana was never meant for a rancher's life —not while Mexican bandits were making plans about him

CHAPTER I.

BROTHER PASCUAL.

THE strides of Brother Pascual were long and swift; but the day strode longer and swifter, by far, to its ending. Shadows as blue as water were flowing through the ravines, rising higher and higher, and the naked summits of the San Carlos Range began to burn with rose and gold flame against the Mexican sky.

But the friar, taking a stronger hold on the staff which was his only companion in this wilderness, gave little heed to the beauty around him. He had only one eye for it, after all, for over the other he wore a big shield of black leather. A plaster patch made a big white cross on the opposite cheek, and a bandage circled his head.

To give his stride greater freedom, he had pulled up his long gray robe so that a fold hung over the cord that girdled him. The lower edge of his garment kicked in and out around his knees, leaving his lower legs free and unhampered. In the calf of each brown

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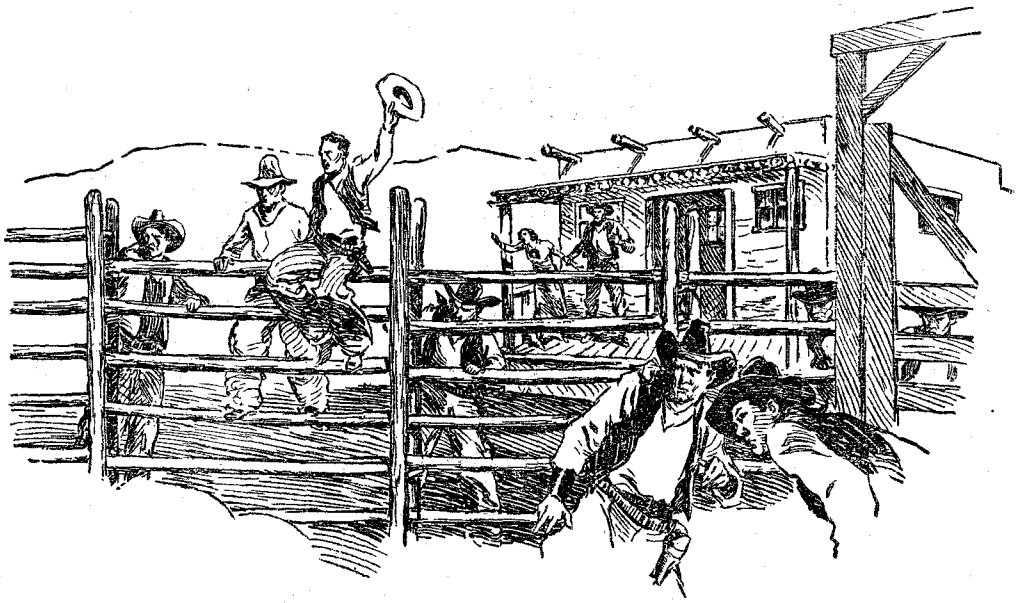

Alarm kept the watchers frozen in their places

and hairy leg there was a mighty fist of muscle, needed for the support of this towering bulk of a man. Yet despite his size, the only provision he carried with him on his journey was a pouch of dry corn meal.

He was dark as an Indian, but his broad face was marked with the pain and the doubt of some high endeavor.

The sun bulged its cheeks in the west, and bled radiant color all across the sky; the heavens darkened to green and amber, then yellow-green and blue, with the green fading rapidly into night as Brother Pascual came to the narrow mouth of a gorge over which leaned pillars of lofty rock. A jack-rabbit darted from behind a stone and fled, leaving the whisper of its speed in the air. And in the mouth of the ravine, the friar paused and shouted:

"Oh-ho! Oh-ho! I am Brother Pascual! *Hai!* Do you hear?—I am Brother Pascual!"

After a moment, while the echoes were still dimly flying, a voice almost at his elbow said, "Well, brother, who's hungry now? Whose bellyache are you to tell us about now?"

"Is it Luis?" asked the friar.

"Luis went spying once too often into the stockyards at Chihuahua. They killed him in the slaughter house. Maybe they made him into sausage.—Damned stringy sausage he must have made, too!"

"What is your name?—Ah, you are Carlos!"

"You've seen me only once—and it's too dark for seeing now, unless you're a cat. How do you remember people, brother?"

"I remember them by their need of mercy," said the friar. "Poor Luis. Is he gone? He had a need of mercy, also!"

"So has every man who rides with Rubriz," answered Carlos.

"So have I.—So have all mortals," declared Brother Pascual, humbly. "I am going on to the house."

"There's plenty of noise in the house," said Carlos. "Yesterday we caught a mule train loaded with—"

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"I don't want to hear it!" broke in Pascual, emphatically. "We are all sinners, Carlos. But good may come out of evil—good may come out of evil!—Saint Nicholas, be large in the eye of my mind!"

With that, he stalked on through the thick blackness of the ravine, which rapidly widened. Trees choked the way. With his long staff, he fended his course through them until he came out on a level valley floor with a stippling of lights nearby, giving the vague outline of a house.

He heard singing and shouting and the beat of running feet, while he was still in the distance; and although he was one who had pledged himself to love good and hate evil, he could not help smiling a little. For Brother Pascual was in many respects a true peon, and therefore he had to forgive a true *bandido* like Mateo Rubriz. A thief steals from all alike; but a *bandido* harries the rich only. And in Mexico there is a belief that grows out of the very soil that all rich men are evil.

WHEN he came to the door of the house, Brother Pascual beat on it three times with his staff. Then he threw the door open on the smoky light of the inner hall, and shouted:

"I—Brother Pascual—am coming! It is I—Brother Pascual!"

The thunder of his voice rumbled through the house, and then a door flung open to his right and let a rush of sound flow out about him.

"Bring in Pascual!" shouted the familiar, strident tones of Mateo Rubriz.

Half-a-dozen wild young fellows leaped through the doorway and seized on the burly friar and drew him into the room. It was the combination kitchen, dining hall and reception chamber of Mateo Rubriz.

A chorus of welcome rose to greet Brother Pascual, and he snuffed up at the fragrance of roasting kid—most delicious of all meat in this world—and the savor of *frijoles* cooked with peppers, the pungency of coffee, and the thin scent of beer and the sour of wine. All these good smells were in that air.

At the long table, some of the men were still eating; others looked on with a careless interest as Mateo Rubriz, equipped with a small balance-scale, measured out lumps of shining white metal and small heaps of heavy yellow dust. Brother Pascual refused to call it silver and gold, because money is the root of all evil—and he loved these men, in spite of himself. So he fastened his gaze solely upon the huge, squat figure of Mateo Rubriz.

Rubriz wore common cotton trousers, furled up to his knees, and cheap *huaraches* on his feet. The sleeves of his shirt were cut off midway, so as to leave unhampered that vast strength which, men said, was unrivalled in all the San Carlos Range—in all Mexico—perhaps and therefore in all the world! So thought Pascual, anyway. And he rejoiced in the might of that fellow peon in his ragged, dirty clothes; he rejoiced in the red silk cap that Rubriz preferred to all the sombreros of cloth or straw. Pascual's heart was touched with sympathy when he marked, diagonally across Mateo's flushed face, the long, white scar which a whiplash had once left on the flesh. Men said that no single whip-stroke could have left such a broad, deep scar; but that Mateo Rubriz, in the passion of his shame and hate, had rubbed salt into his wound to freshen it and keep it burning on his face as

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rage burned in his heart. At any rate, there was the sign, clearly visible on the man's face whenever it reddened. Which was often.

"Come here, little old Pascual!" Rubriz was thundering. "What have you been doing to yourself? I've told you that if you keep taking your short-cuts through the mountains, up the cliffs and down the Devil's Slides, you'd have a fall, one of these days.—Well, if you've had a fall like that, thank God that your head was battered but not broken!—Come here and dip your hands into this sack—all gold—and take out the fill of your big hands.

"You can weight down your pockets and spend it all on your poor! You can buy a new mule for your *arriero,* a new cow for your housewife, and a new gun for the hunter, a new trap for the trapper. You can give sheep to the shepherd and cattle to the poor *charro.* Dip in your hands, as deep as the wrists, and pull out whatever your fingers will hold.—Come, Pascual!—*Hai!* My children! We shall all be a thousand leagues nearer to heaven when Brother Pascual has prayed for us!"

BROTHER PASCUAL stood by the bandit and looked at the buck-skin sack which held such treasure. He was aware, too, of the gleam of white metal and yellow, up and down the table.

He took a deep breath and looked up to the smoke-blackened rafters of the room.

"Father, forgive them!" he said from his heart. Then he added, "Not even for my poor, Mateo. Give me something to eat, as soon as I have washed.

"But stolen money poisons even the poor."

Mateo caught him by the wrists and looked him up and down, half-savagely and half-fondly.

"Listen to me!" he cried. "Be silent, every one. Mateo Rubriz is speaking. Do you hear?—One day I shall give up this life and go into a desert with this good man. I shall scratch up roots with my bare hands and feed on them. I shall drink nothing but clear spring water.—Give me a cup of that wine, one of you!—And I shall spend the rest of my days praying and doing penance."

He seized a great, jewelled cup which was handed to him, brimming with sour red wine, and poured half the contents down his throat.

"When I do penance," he roared, "it shall be the greatest penance that ever was done by a Mexican.—And Mexicans are the only men!"

He made a gesture, and some of the wine slopped out of the cup and splashed from the floor onto the bare, hairy calves of his legs.

"Do you hear me, Pascual? By heaven, I shall be such a saint, one day, that they'll have to shift in their chairs and crowd their halos closer together to make room for Mateo Rubriz!

"Give me some more of that wine, some one! I have not tasted a drink for a month of desert days. Pascual, go wash if you please, and then come back and eat.—By San Juan of Capistrano! There is redder blood in me than this wine—and every drop of it sings when I see such a good man."

Brother Pascual went to the well in the little patio outside the room, and there, as he threw off his long robe and washed the sweat and the sand of travel from his body, he could still hear Rubriz's voice, exclaiming:

"The rest of you—all swine at a

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trough! There is no other man in the world. There is only Brother Pascual!"

WHEN Pascual came back into the room he found a huge platter of kid, hot from the turning of the spit, and a mass of *frijoles* and thin, limber, damp *tortillas*. He used the *tortillas* as spoon and fork. A knife from his wallet was his carver. As he ate, he sipped moderately from a big glass of the red wine, though *pulque* would have been more to his truly Mexican taste.

The division of the spoils had been completed now, and the treasure was cleared from the table; yet here and there a bright yellow dust appeared on the rough wood. The wages of ten laborers for a month were wasted out of the superfluity of these robbers. Mateo Rubriz himself was now eating again, walking up and down with his jewelled wine cup in one hand, in the other a fat second joint from which he tore long shreds with those powerful teeth of his.

"Now is the time to speak, Lucio," said Rubriz. "You have been sitting there with fire in your eyes, devouring Jose with glances. Tell me what was wrong."

Lucio stood up. He lacked the rounded, blubbery face of a peon; his features were more the type of the aristocrat, and his cheeks were so hollow that they pulled at the corners of his mouth, giving him the semblance of a sneering smile. He said:

"Jose, stand up!"

"Aye—to you or to any man!" said a youth with very wide shoulders and very bowed legs.

He was the true peon type. He swaggered out and stood well forward on the floor.

"When they came chasing after us," said Lucio, "my horse went down under me. I ran as well as my legs would carry me. I heard hoofbeats. I looked back, and saw that a friend was riding up. It was Jose. I held out my hand to let him help me up.—But by St. Christopher, he galloped right past me! He even tried to look the other way. And the *rurales* and the soldiers would surely have got me, except that I found a crack among the rocks, and ran and fell into it like a lizard.—Mateo Rubriz, give me a judgment! Is that fellowship? A lame dog would be better treated by its fellows!"

A little murmur came out of the throats of the crowd. It was not loud, but it was high-pitched, and therefore the friar knew the strain of anger from which it sprang.

"No, speak, Jose," said Rubriz.

"This!" said Jose, loudly. "I saw Lucio running, of course. I wanted to help him, but I had a whole sack of the gold in the saddlebag. To throw away myself and my horse—that was nothing, though the *rurales* were sure to catch us both if I tried to make the pinto carry double. But there was the gold. And so I rode on.—Speak up with a big voice, Lucio. Are you worth thirty pounds of gold?"

Lucio said nothing. He looked ready to leap at Jose, but he could not bring up words from his throat.

The whole room was hushed. Men leaned from their places, their eyes intent on the leader, who still walked calmly up and down.

But now he paused and pointed the ragged joint of roast meat at Jose.

"SILVER is a good thing, and gold is better; but not even silver and gold and emeralds and diamonds are worth one drop of blood! Blood is better than money.—Jose, you have

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not been with me long; you have not learned. Otherwise, by San Juan of Capistrano, I would hang you from that rafter, with my own hands!—Ride past a dismounted comrade? Leave a friend behind for the *rurales?*—However, as I say, you have been with me only a short time. What I tell you now you will remember, no?"

"I remember," said Jose, suddenly abashed and staring at the floor.

"Are you satisfied, Lucio?" asked the master.

"No," said Lucio, curtly.

"Take knives, then. Strip to the waist. Carve each other or kill each other. That is the law.—But we'll have no hatreds inside my band of *charros.*"

"Good!" said Jose, and he began to tear off his jacket.

Lucio said nothing, but there was speech in his burning eyes and in his sneering lips.

That was when Brother Pascual stood up and went to Lucio.

"Lucio," he said, "when your brother was sick in the mountains, I searched till I found him and carried him into the camp on my shoulders."

"Therefore," said Lucio, "ask me for my right hand and it is yours."

"Give it to me, then," said the gigantic friar.

He took the right hand of the astonished Lucio and half led, half dragged, him across the floor to confront Jose.

"Give your hand to me, Jose," he commanded.

"My hand is my own!" said Jose, sullenly.

But Pascual's huge grip closed suddenly on the nape of Jose's neck. He shook the young bandit violently, and a knife flashed into Jose's hand. It jerked back, but it was not driven home into the great, fearless breast of Brother Pascual. And it was awe of the friar, rather than the fierce yell that went up from the others, that caused the knife to drop to the floor.

"Now give me your hand!" shouted Pascual, enraged. "Or I'll carry you out and throw you into the slime of the hog wallow, where I've thrown bigger and stronger men than you!"

"Brother, forgive me!" said Jose, helplessly, and he gave his right hand.

Pascual instantly clapped it into that of Lucio.

He stood over the two men, who glared at one another.

"Jose is a fool. But he is a young fool, and he can learn wisdom," boomed Pascual. "Lucio, grip his hand. I, Brother Pascual, command you.—Jose, tell him that you were wrong. A sulky man is worse than a sulky dog! but a confession washes the heart clean."

THERE was a moment of pause, so tense that the breathing of the men in the room could be heard, and the ripping sounds as Mateo Rubriz tore at his joint of roast meat.

Then Jose said, suddenly, weakly, "I was wrong.—Lucio, I hated you because you got the black mare that I wanted. Will you forget?"

"Is it true?" said Lucio, stunned and gaping. "Do you confess this before them all?—Then you are my brother!"

And suddenly he had flung his arms around Jose.

"I am shamed—but I was wrong," said Jose.

"Shamed?" cried Lucio. "I shall kill the man who smiles!"

But there was no smiling. Only the sound made by Mateo Rubriz as he hurled toward the hearth the big bone which he had picked clean. It clanged

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loudly against an iron pot, and spun into the ashes, knocking up a white cloud.

"By the blood of the Lord!" cried Rubriz. "My men have turned into women!—Well, let them go, so long as I have you, Pascual. But have you only come here to make my poor fellows drop their knives on the floor?"

"I have come to speak seriously with you, Mateo," answered the big friar.

"You hear that he wants to speak to me!" called Rubriz to the rest. "Then why do you wait? You have money in your wallets and food in your bellies.—Go! Drink yourselves to sleep and be damned!—Away with you!"

CHAPTER II.

MEXICAN HEART.

THEY faced one another across the long table.

"Tell me about your tumble, first," suggested Rubriz. "Well, even them mountain sheep break their necks, now and again. If something hit you near the eye, then you can at least thank your God that you are not blinded."

"The gun-butt hit the bone over my eye; that was all," said the friar.

"Gun-butt?" said Rubriz, suddenly scowling. Then he pointed. "Gun-butt, eh?—And what hit the other side of your face?"

"The point of a knife," answered Brother Pascual. "But it was nothing."

The bandit began to steal around the table as though he hoped to surprise news in the very mind of his big friend.

"And your head?—The bandage, there?" he demanded, quietly.

"That is not very bad, either. The bullet glanced; I have a hard skull—"

"The butt of a gun—a knife—a bullet?—Splendor of God! What fools have forgotten that you are the friend of Mateo Rubriz?"

"The Governor of Duraya and his soldiers."

"General Ignacio Estrada? Where did he dare to beat you?"

"In the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe."

"The governor—beats you? In the church? What were you doing?"

"Fighting a little, Mateo, to keep the governor and the rest of the masked men from stealing the emerald crown of Our Lady."

"Why, brother, that crown was stolen long years ago!"

"It was found, by a peon whose son was very sick. He brought the crown back to the church; and his son was healed. And then the governor stole the emeralds and the gold again."

"How was he known, if his face was masked?"

"The holy bishop recognized the voice of the principal robber."

"Bishop Emiliano?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" cried Rubriz. "That little man may be as thin as a knife, but he can cut as deep. He knows me, does he not?"

"You have made many good presents to the church."

"It knows my gold and it knows my silver. Do you hear, brother? When the name of Rubriz is spoken in that church, all the shadows stir and the statues whisper a prayer for me. I tell you this—in that church alone I have bought half the distance from hell to heaven."

The friar smiled a little.

"But this Estrada—what do you tell me about him? No good man ever wore the name of general—except Bonita Juarez, God rest his soul!"

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"God rest his soul!" echoed the friar devoutly. "But General Estrada came into the church. The poor monks ran away. Only the bishop guarded the image of Our Lady—"

"I would rather have one blessing from the good bishop than ten thousand *aves* from a whole college of singing priests!"

"PEACE, Mateo!" commanded the friar, sternly. He went on, "The holy bishop recognized the voice of the general, and called out his name; and Estrada desired to leave no witness behind him. He struck Bishop Emiliano to the floor."

"That poor, bald head?—Did it crack like an eggshell?" asked Rubriz.

"No, for Our Lady had softened the blow or made it glance. The bishop still lives, and the governor sits in his fort, with the crown of Our Lady and the ten emeralds in it."

"But you were there yourself?" demanded Rubriz, his face swelling and purpling with emotion.

"It had taken me a little time to get up from my knees, because I had been very deep in prayer. I came shouting at them.—But they struck down the holy bishop. I took a pair of the soldiers and knocked their heads together."

"San Juan of Capistrano! If only I had been there to see and to help!"

"The two soldiers fell down. I knocked over another; but I tripped on him, and he stabbed at me and put the point of his knife in my cheek. As I was getting up, a gun exploded. I felt that blow on my head, as the bullet struck; and another man hit me over the eye with the butt of his gun. I tried to keep my wits, but they flew away into darkness like a flock of crows—and I fell on my face."

"May those robbing swine rot with a blight! I'll put them on their faces! If I don't cut off their eyelids and stake them out in the sun, my name is not—"

"Mateo, be still!—The bishop called for me the next day—this morning. He said to me, 'If I complain of the stealing, then all the hawks will gather; and the jewels will be scattered through the land. It is better to carry word about this to Mateo Rubriz, because he will not allow this thing to be.'"

"Did he say that?" exclaimed Rubriz, leaping to his feet. "No wonder he's a bishop! If he knows men as well as this, he must know a good bit about saints and angels, also. I shall show him, Pascual, that I am a man to trust.—But what does he want me to do? I shall go to Duraya and cut the throat of the general, the first time he leaves the fort at night!"

"That would leave the emerald crown still safely inside the fort, Mateo."

"*Hai!* That is true! But—Pascual—in the name of heaven, the bishop doesn't think that I can fly like a bird or dig like a mole to get into the fort, and then stand invisible inside it till I've found the emeralds and taken them? Does he think that?"

The friar sighed. He looked down at his own great hands and was silent.

"But that *is* what he wishes!" muttered Rubriz. He turned pale. On the hair of his bare arm he smeared some of the sweat of his face. "No one man in this world could do the thing!" he cried. "Look at me, Pascual, and tell me that I am right!"

BUT Pascual, in a misery, continued to stare silently down at his tightly clasped hands.

"I shall find ten other emeralds and make them into a golden crown twice as big!" exclaimed Rubriz.

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"Mateo, beware of blasphemy!" said the friar.

"True!" groaned Rubriz. "That crown is a holy thing. It has come from the brow of Our Lady.—May God pour the fire of hell into the bones of Estrada! But what can I do—alone?"

"You have many men," said Brother Pascual, softly, as though he wished that his words might become part of the other man's thought.

"I have men?—I have hands and feet and guns to help me, too. But for such work numbers are a loss, not an advantage. To be secret as a snake, quick as a cat's paw, without fear under heaven—all of these things I am. But where is there another to be my brother in the danger? Oh, Pascual, two men together may outface the devil; but one man alone—is the fort at Duraya—"

He threw up his arms with a groan.

"Is there no other man?" asked the friar.

"There is one other, but he could not come."

"Could money buy him?"

"No, for he is rich."

"For the sake of Our Lady, then?"

"He is a gringo dog," cried Rubriz, pacing the floor, "and Our Lady means nothing to him. Besides, if he were to try to ride south into Mexico, a whisper of his coming would go before him. The stones would yell out under his feet, 'El Keed!' That is how he is hated and wanted by the *rurales*—by the soldiers!"

"Ah, Mateo, is this gringo the only man?—This man you hate?"

"Aye, this man I hate is the only one.—But also I love him, and he loves me.—*Hai,* Pascual! Think. I once had him under the muzzle of my gun. His life was like this—in my hand to crush. And there lay Tonio, the traitor—Pascual, keep me from speaking about it. Oh, God! These are not tears of water that run out of my eyes. They are tears of blood, and my heart is weeping.

"But I let them both go free, because Tonio loves me, even while he is wearing another name and speaking another speech. And Montana, I saw, was the second man in the world. There is Rubriz—then Montana, the man known as El Keed. There is no third.—I could not kill El Keed. I left the house. I took his hand. We spoke quietly. We were friends. For a little while, as I went away, my heart was so full of my friend, gringo though he was, that I could forget how I had lost Tonio through him."

BROTHER PASCUAL, listening to this speech, was so intent that sweat ran unheeded on his face, faster than Rubriz's tears. He knew very well that famous tale of how the Montana Kid, by means of a tattooed birthmark, had insinuated himself into the Lavery household in the place of the son whom Rubriz, to repay a whip-stroke, had stolen twenty years before. And then some stroke of conscience had driven the Kid south into Mexico, to find the real heir, whom he had seen there in his wanderings.

Pascual knew how Montana had fought to take young "Tonio" away, and how Rubriz, who had raised the boy to love him and to hate the gringos, had resisted desperately and then pursued the pair north toward the Rio Grande. Now Tonio had been restored to his blood and his family; he had been sent off to Europe, to put some distance between him and his terrible foster father, Rubriz. And the Montana Kid—El Keed, in Mexico—remained on the Lavery ranch about to

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marry the daughter of the family. The story was one that men were sure to remember and to talk about. But nothing about it was more strange than that Rubriz respected Montana even more than he hated that reckless young adventurer.

Rubriz blew his nose with a great snorting sound.

"Now I am better," he said.

"This Montana who stole Tonio—" began the friar.

"Be silent!" shouted Rubriz, with the face of a madman.

"If he were with you, might you not steal back the emeralds, even from Fort Duraya and General Estrada? And if you went to El Keed, might he not remember how you once spared him? Might he not ride with you, in spite of the danger?"

"He is to marry Tonio's sister. How can I make him leave her?"

"Mateo, it is not for us to doubt. Let us go north, toward the land of the gringos. Let us cross the river. When we have come to the place, God will surely show us the proper way. He will bring even Montana into our hands."

Rubriz, at this, stopped his pacing. His head began to lift higher and higher.

"Pascual," he said, "who can tell? Perhaps it is true. Perhaps it is the will of God, after all. Perhaps God wishes to see Mateo Rubriz at the side of El Keed. For even God Himself could never guess what two such men might do.—It is true! I feel that the thing shall be. We shall ride together; we shall work together. And what will walls of stone be—what will soldiers be—when we two are side by side?"

He shook his head from side to side.

"But he is a gringo.—Ah, the pity of it!" said the friar.

"Aye," groaned Rubriz. "The pity of it!—But only his skin is American, for his heart is pure Mexican!"

CHAPTER III.

BROKEN PROMISE.

IN the corral, the blood-bay mare was being drawn to the snubbing post.

And that great rider of outlaw horses, Tombstone Joe, was pulling the ropes.

The cowpunchers sat like crows on the fence posts, eight feet from the ground. The Montana Kid was among these crows. To those on the veranda of the ranchhouse he looked like any of the others, except that his shoulders were a little wider and the big double cord of back muscle could be distinguished, even at that distance, and through the shirt.

Ruth Lavery stood by one of the porch pillars.

"We ought to go down," she said.

"There's no use having too much audience," said Richard Lavery. "That would make Montana want to ride the mare himself."

"But he's promised not to," answered the girl.

Fear changed the blue of her eyes as she spoke, nevertheless.

"Promises—well, promises are still only words, to Montana," said her father.

"Don't say that!" she protested.

"Well, I won't say it, then," answered tall Richard Lavery.

But he kept his thought in the grim lines of his face.

"You've never loved him!" said the girl, nervously, still gripping the pillar against which she leaned.

"Honor and respect him I can," conceded Lavery, curtly. "He's more *man* than anyone I know."

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At this, she sighed, quickly, as one sighs when a great emotion is constantly pent up within him. And she broke out, suddenly:

"You think he's only a tramp!"

"I don't think he's *only* a tramp," said Richard Lavery.

"You think he's a tramp—and something more," said the girl, speaking quietly, though mostly to herself. "You sent Dick away to Europe—to get him away from Montana—to get him away from temptation. You've never trusted Montana. I don't know why."

He looked down at a black band around the arm of his coat. His wife had died two months before.

"Now that your mother is gone," said Lavery, very gently, "do you think that he'll be with us long?"

She lifted her head a little. As if to find the answer there, she scanned the long lines of the valley, and the high plateaus, and the green pasture lands for miles and miles. All belonged to the Lavery estate. Dick Lavery, who had once been called Tonio Rubriz, would be heir to half of that estate. Montana had brought him back from Mexican oblivion to share the rich heritage. The other half of the estate would go to Ruth and to Montana.

"We'll be married this Sunday," she said, briefly.

"He's put it off before," said the rancher, and there was no mercy in his hard voice. "He'll put it off again."

"He won't!—This is the last time. He knows it." Then she added in a half-weary, half-sad outburst, "Doesn't he care about me?"

There was puzzled torment in her eyes.

"Aye, he cares about you.—And he cares about other things, too. Horses, and guns—and his freedom. Marriage won't fit him well."

DOWN in the corral, Tombstone Joe walked backwards and looked over the mare. Now that he had snubbed her against the post, other men were blindfolding her, working on bridle and saddle. Ransome, the gray-headed ranch foreman, was in charge of this business.

"What you think of her, Tombstone?" asked Ransome.

"Half dynamite and half wildcat," said Tombstone. "She's too damn pretty to be good!"

Said the Montana Kid, from the fence, "You don't hitch onto a streak of lightning and ask is it good. You ask how far it'll take you."

Tombstone turned sharply around to rebuke the speaker. Then he saw that it was the Kid, and instead of answering he rubbed his jaw, slowly, as though he had been hit there on a day.

The Kid did not smile. His brown, handsome face remained perfectly calm; but as he stared at the mare, the blue of his eyes burned continually paler and brighter. He pushed his hat back from his forehead and showed the blue-black of sleeked hair. He was so dark that he looked almost like a Mexican. Except that during moments of excitement the blue of his eyes turned bright and pale. He was like the mare—big, but with sinews and proportions that made him look swift and light.

"This here streak," said Tombstone, "it'll take you far all right—it'll take you to hell—but it might leave you there, too."

The Kid tapped the ashes from his cigarette and made no answer. His eyes were on the mare. She was waiting patiently, submitting to the dark-

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ness that enveloped her eyes, muffled in her own thoughts. Yet there was danger in her patience. Her head drooping a little, there was nothing about her to suggest a wild-caught mustang.

In the old days, wild-caught hawks made the best hunting falcons. She was wild-caught, and therefore she would be one of the best. The Kid knew it. He kept tasting her strength and her speed, as he had tasted them ever since the day when he had started with many men on her trail. The length of that trail had caused the third postponement of his marriage to Ruth Lavery. Now he sat on the fence to watch this famous horsebreaker try his hand, because Montana had given Ruth his faithful, solemn promise never to mount the mare until she was well broken. That was why little electric thrills kept starting in his heart and flooding out through his forehead and his fingertips.

THE bridle and the saddle were adjusted now, and Tombstone mounted gingerly. Many falls had taught him shameless caution. He acted almost like a man who was afraid.

"Let her go," he said, quietly.

The bandage was taken from her eyes, the rope instantly disengaged from her neck. And the mare shot at the sky.

Nobody spoke. They had all seen an infinity of horsebreaking, but this was not the same thing. They stiffened on the fenceposts. They looked with great eyes, seeing and thinking. Horses have to be broken, but the mare looked like Beauty and the man looked like the Beast.

Nevertheless, he was a frightened Beast. There was no pretense of the dashing, cavalier ride which a cowpuncher tries to show at a rodeo. Tombstone started that way, sitting straight up and raking the mare fore and aft with his spurs; but after the second jump he was pulling leather like a tenderfoot caught in a horse-storm.

For this was a tornado that he was trying to ride. It rushed as though it would tear down the fence. It turned as though it would bore a hole through the ground. And all at once Tombstone sailed out of the saddle sidewise. He struck the corral soil, raised a dust, struck it again, and lay limp and still.

Three nooses settled over the neck of the mare and held her as she tried to get at the fallen rider and savage him. Some one crawled under the fence and dragged Tombstone to safety. Some one else emptied a canteen over Tombstone's upturned face. After a while he breathed. Then he stood up.

"She foxed me that time, but I'll get her the next time," he said.

Ransome, the foreman, said to the Kid, "Well, what you think?"

"She's a sweetheart!" said the Montana Kid, enthusiastically.

He eased himself down from the fence, on the inside. They were snubbing the mare close up to the post again.

Ransome grabbed Montana's arm.

"Look at," he said. "Don't you be a damned fool! Keep away from temptation."

The Kid looked down at Ransome's hand, and Ransome hastily took it away.

"We'll just have a look-see," said the Kid.

"You been and promised Miss Ruth!" said Ransome, huskily.

"Did I?" said the Kid, absently.

He walked around the front of the

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mare and looked into her eyes. She was quiet. The only thing she had learned was the burn of ropes, and she did not fight. Not outwardly. The devil was quiet in her now, waiting.

Some one said, from the fence, "He could handle hell fire—but not *that* fire."

Another man said, "What's her name? What you gonna call her, Montana?"

"You better call her before you're dead," said another, dryly.

"Her name's Sally," said the Kid, gently.

He smiled, beatifically, at the men on the fence, including them all in the gentleness of his glance. They feared him so much that they almost hated him; but because they loved him, also, no man smiled back.

"Why call her Sally?" asked Ransome, the foreman.

"I once knew a gal called Sally," said the Kid.

"Did she look like this mare?" asked Ransome.

"She wore black silk stockings all around—like this one," said the Kid, gently.

Tombstone Joe was fitting himself carefully into the saddle.

Montana said, "Watch her, Joe."

"Who the hell is giving me advice?" asked Tombstone.

Montana sighed and closed his eyes. When he opened them, the hoofs of the mare were beating the corral like a drum. The dust went up as thick as water before it exploded into spray. Through the upper mist, they had glimpses of the fighting mare, and of Tombstone clinging to her like a shipwrecked man.

Something hit the ground, slithering sidewise and ploughing up the dust. With the last flopping turn it appeared, the body of a man. The clothes were white with dust. The face was black with it.

UP on the veranda, the girl screamed; but no one turned to look toward her. She had not screamed because Tombstone was on the ground, sprawling. The cry came from her when she saw Montana leave the fence, as a puma leaves a bough for a kill.

To the men who watched, close up, the similarity was even greater. They saw the devouring hunger in Montana's eyes. They saw him crouching, gripping the top rail of the fence with both hands. The next moment, he was plunging through the dust that smoked across the face of the corral. They saw him dodging through it while the wild mare tried to flee from him—as though she feared tooth and claw.

He caught her like that, too. As she swerved out of a corner, he leaped at her with hands and feet. She soared. He appeared, gripping the pommel with one hand, the rest of him streaming upwards. But a moment later he was in the saddle.

The dust billowed like fog struck by a sea-wind. The mare was like the wind. They had glimpses of her red mouth gaping, the sheen of her wild eyes. They saw her high up, fighting thin air. They heard her strike the ground again and again, the shadowy form of the rider shocked and snapped to either side. By a single foot, a single hand, he seemed to be clinging half the time—as if with talons that hooked into tender flesh.

The watchers were frozen in place, because this was not a riding contest; there was death in the air. Tombstone Joe leaned on the fence with his face black and dripping blood, clotted with

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dust. The yelling had ended. Every cowpuncher was motionless; one man was on one knee; another on tiptoe, gripping the toe of a post. He seemed to be yelling, though no sound came. Still another held his hat rigidly above his head, but forgot to wave it.

And from the veranda it could be seen that the head of Montana, at every impact, wavered crazily up and down. His chin was beating on his breast. At every lurch of the mare he seemed about to shoot from the saddle, but something made him stick there. Luck, some men might have called it; but it was not luck.

This was not riding a horse; it was killing. Either the man or the mare would fall dead, surely.

Then she staggered and stood still, her legs braced wide apart; and after a time Montana got slowly down from the saddle. He slid down. His face was crimson, and blood from his mouth, his ears and his nose had covered his face with a red mask.

He felt his way to the mare's head.

He put his arm around her neck and began to stroke her face. And she, her eyes half-closed with exhaustion, leaned against him slightly.

He pulled out his bandanna; but instead of drying his own frightful face, he began to wipe the slobber and the froth from Sally's muzzle.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LURE.

IT was only a few days after this that Mateo Rubriz sat in a *cantina* in "Greaser Town," the Mexican adjunct of Bentonville, near the Lavery ranch. Good Brother Pascual had left the table as soon as he had finished his dish of hot *frijoles*. There remained only Mateo Rubriz and a sallow-faced man with high, squared shoulders, such as one expects to see only in a soldier. He looked like an army officer —and a consumptive. He wore the gay conspicuous garb of a prosperous Mexican *charro*, on which the silver brightened and waned as he turned in his chair or lifted his glass to drink the green-white tequila.

He was Jack Lascar. Every one south of the border knew him, and every one north of the river knew him; but no one knew his nationality. Some people said that he was, in fact, a Lascar. They looked at the yellow whites of his eyes and said that.

He carried himself with an air of amused superiority. He retained this air as he said:

"If I walk into the street and tell people that Mateo Rubriz is in here—if I tell the gringos that—what'll they do to you, Rubriz?"

Mateo Rubriz grinned with good-natured delight. A stiff wave of flesh rose up from his cheeks and almost obscured his eyes as he smiled. He leaned forward.

"Your father—" he began.

After that, his voice was so soft that Jack Lascar had to bend his head to hear the words. A dreamy expression came over Lascar's face.

"That's what I always wanted to know," said Lascar. "I always wanted to know who cut him down.—It was you?"

"Who else would have dared?" asked Rubriz, leaning back, with a two-handed gesture of triumph.

Jack Lascar grunted. "Then what do you want?" he asked.

"I want you to accept a favor," said the Mexican.

"Humph!" grunted Lascar again. "Well?"

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"You hate one man a good deal, I know," said Rubriz.

"Do I?"

"The Montana Kid?"

Jack Lascar turned a little in his chair, quickly. He glanced over his shoulder at the door. He looked at the window, also. Then he finished the white fire of his tequila and stared at Rubriz.

"Damn him!" said Jack Lascar.

"Once, in Nevada, in the Imperial Saloon in Carson City," began Rubriz, "on a Tuesday morning—"

"Damn you," said Lascar, suddenly furious.

Rubriz leaned back in his chair. He looked, at that moment, like a fat, rather soft man of middle age—a pulpy creature half rotted by time. But Jack Lascar knew otherwise.

"This Montana Kid," said Rubriz, "is a man who would come to a challenge like a dog to raw meat. Now, if you write out a challenge in English.—Can you write English?"

"I write five languages!" said Lascar, slowly, bitterly. "And I punch cows for a damned—"

"Gringo," supplied Rubriz, still smiling.

Jack Lascar was silent.

Then Rubriz said, "If you were to write out a challenge and nail it on the post office notice board, the town would know. The Kid would know it, too, and he would come. And the sheriff, he is not in town—the law is not in town to-day. It is away—for one whole day!"

JACK LASCAR lighted a cigarette. He held out his glass. The keeper of the *cantina* came running in whispering slippers. He filled the glass until it ran over onto the floor. Lascar slopped the drink into his mouth. A part of it drizzled down his chin and dropped unheeded onto his gaudy costume. He did not even wipe his face, as he continued to stare at Rubriz.

"The Montana Kid would come!" said Rubriz.

"He would *not* come!" said Jack Lascar. "Everybody knows. Even the little babies know that if Montana ever pulls a gun and shoots at another man—even in self-defense—the sheriff will be on his trail with a posse."

Rubriz closed his eyes to keep the fires in them from being seen. It was his plan—his whole plan—to tear Montana away from the land of the gringos by staging a seeming break with the law. After that, where could he flee, except into Mexico? And with whom would he travel so readily as with Mateo Rubriz? Once on the road, would not the robbing of the fort at Duraya be to El Keed no more than the drinking of a glass of whiskey?—If only this Jack Lascar could be used as the lure!

"No matter what he fears," said Rubriz, "he fears shame more. You know, of course, that I have good reason to curse him?"

"He stole away your son, I know," Jack Lascar sneered. "He took your son—and carried him away and made him into a gringo."

"He did," said Rubriz, with an immense calm which was not an affectation. "That is the reason why he must die."

He meant that. No matter what friendship lay between them, for that deed El Keed must one day die. And Rubriz, staring out the window at the day's red dying as he breathed the sharp, stale scent of cigarette smoke, looked across the little round, iron tables, and continued:

"*I* cannot challenge him because I

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dare not appear. As soon as I show myself in the streets the people would rise up in a wave and wash me away into a jail. But *you* can challenge him.—You can name the hour. You can stand in the middle of the street and wait, while every one wonders that any man could have the courage to wait for El Keed in a fair fight.

"How will they know that Mateo Rubriz lies in hiding beside one of the houses? Or inside a window, with a rifle aimed and ready to end the fight before it begins?—Do you hear, Jack? El Keed will be dead before he has a chance to become an outlaw again! He will be dead before he has a chance to run away from the law."

CHAPTER V.

RUNAWAY.

SUNDAY morning on the Lavery ranch found the Montana Kid moving about in his room with a slight limp, but he whistled as he encased his long body and his strong shoulders in a white shirt and collar, in socks of black silk, and in a fine blue-black serge suit. One thing he would not do; he refused to change boots for shoes. But unless his trousers were hitched up no one could tell that boots of softest, most highly polished calf were what he wore. For they were not the high-heeled pinch-toes of the usual cowpuncher.

If a horse dropped under Montana, he could not afford to be hobbled by tight boots; he had to land like a running cat, into which animal sundry enemies of his had more than once seen him transformed. Even as he knotted his necktie on this day, his wedding day, he kept on flexing his feet a little in those soft boots, because he could not tell what guns might look at him before this day was ended. It was what he most disliked—an advertised appearance; and there were plenty of men in the world who might want to take advantage of it.

He would need three pairs of eyes with which to keep on guard this day; but that was what he had needed a great part of his life, and perhaps it was why he was whistling now. His stay on the Lavery ranch had been like being becalmed in a quiet backwater, a pause in the hurry of the current that was headed toward some wild and unknown sea.

Now that he was dressed, he looked quizzically in the mirror at his brown face, and found that the blue-bright eyes were alert for danger, rather than for happiness.

Gray-headed Ransome, the foreman, who had poured himself, tight and helpless, into his Sunday clothes, smoked a cigarette and watched the procedure of his friend.

"It'll be a great day," said Ransome.

"A *long* day," corrected the Kid.

"Any bozo might think," suggested Ransome, "that you wasn't gonna step out with a beauty that had a couple millions to float her."

"Might any bozo think that?" murmured Montana.

"Any bozo might think," went on Ransome, frowning heavily, "that you didn't give much of a damn about one of the prettiest, sweetest girls in the world."

Montana turned. There was combined in his movements a certain speed and a luxurious leisure, like that of a juggler who lets not the flash but the pausing of his hands be seen.

Ransome stood up as though danger threatened him—and perhaps danger did. But though the temper of the Kid

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was as quick as the stroke of a startled diamond-back, his friendship was a force as unalterable as the force of gravity. And Ransome was his friend.

So the foreman went on, "Montana, I don't care if you get sore. I'm gonna tell you what I think. You were pretty fond of Mrs. Lavery. She was a good deal like a mother to you. After she died, you begun to find this here ranch sort of cramped. It wasn't no pasture for a mustang like you. It wasn't a box-stall, even. You've got so tired of the Lavery ranch that you're tired of the girl, too—before you marry her!"

The Kid, instead of answering, looked at Ransome with eyes that had become the color of slate; then he picked up that pair of Colts with the extra long barrels, and made them disappear inside his clothes with one of those swift, easy gestures which the eye could not follow very well.

After that, he went to Ransome and laid a light touch on the foreman's shoulder.

"Old Ransome!" he said.

"Yeah—old Ransome be damned!" said the foreman. "What about old Montana, I'm asking?"

MANY other things were going on at the same time, about the big Lavery house. There was Ruth Lavery, in her room, being draped in films of white. She smiled a good deal, until the girl who was the best of her friends said to her, suddenly, whispering:

"Ruth, are you smiling because you're happy—or just to please me?"

"I'm happy, of course!" answered Ruth Lavery. "But I'm frightened, too. Something is going to happen I feel sure . . ."

And in front of the house Richard Lavery, Senior, was walking restlessly up and down, up and down, scanning the horizon from time to time as though he expected a sign of changing weather to roll darkly up on the edge of the world.

He turned almost expectantly toward a sudden rattle of hoofs that beat on the lower trail and then revealed a rider on a sweating mustang. The young fellow had a look of anxiety, as though wild Indians were behind him.

He threw himself out of the saddle and ran to Lavery.

"D'you know what's happened?" he gasped. "Jack Lascar—that yaller-faced feller called Lascar that showed up in town the other day—he's gone and nailed a notice on the bulletin board in front of the post office. I've copied it down!"

He pulled out a piece of paper and read aloud. Half the words were a gasping whisper, and half were almost shouted:

"Everybody notice that wants to:

"Me that is Jack Lascar is going to stand out in the middle of the street in front of Hi Bailey's blacksmith shop at ten-thirty this same morning and wait for the low yaller hound by name of Montana Kid.

"If he don't show up then and there, you all know what kind of a skunk he is.

"(*Signed*)

"*Jack Lascar.*"

"Wait a moment!" exclaimed Lavery. "Where's the sheriff?—What does he mean by permitting open challenges in a place like Bentonville?"

"The sheriff's out of town," said the messenger. "Some of the boys have sent for him. He ought to be back by

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about ten-thirty. But I thought you might want to know—"

"Get off this ranch!" cried Lavery, in sudden panic. "Don't let Montana see you. If he should find out—"

He saw that the rounded eyes of the messenger were peering straight past him, and, turning, Richard Lavery saw Montana, standing in the open door of the house. Above the white of his stiff collar, his face looked even browner and younger than ever. Montana was rolling a cigarette, letting his fingers feel their own way. Then he spoke.

"You ride back and tell Jack Lascar that it's a little late for me to get his message, but that I'm coming down there as fast as a good horse will take me. Tell him that I'll finish the job I left half done, a while back."

He scratched the match, touched the flame to the crimped end of the wheat-straw paper, and took in a good, deep breath of the smoke. His eyes had an absent look, as though he considered adding something more to his reply to the challenge. But the messenger jerked his head in understanding, and ran back to his pony. It was something worth remembering, during one's life, to be the connecting link between two men like Jack Lascar and Montana.

THE Kid started for the corrals. As for Lavery, he made a few steps in pursuit; then he paused and lifted an arm and parted his lips—but the words did not come. Instead, he turned and made for the house, walking with short steps, like a man stiffened with anger.

The Kid, in the small corral nearest the big barn, went out to the blood-bay mare that he had christened Sally. She fled for a moment, like a bird with a hawk overhead; but presently she stood still and with her bright eyes laughed at the man and at her own fear. For the two, man and horse, had become new friends, but very deep friends, since the day of their fight to a finish. Montana led her by the mane into the saddle-shed. Already, his serge suit was dusted over with white. But there was no time to change. Even as things stood, he would have to travel fast to get to Bentonville by ten-thirty.

When he got into the saddle and jogged around the corner of the barn, he saw that he would have to face all the music in one great burst. A complete picture of disapproval had been painted for him. For on the veranda stood the assembled family, down to the one-legged cook; a shimmer of white that would be Ruth Lavery, in the center of the group, and her father tall and straight and forbidding beside her.

Montana rode straight up to them and pulled off his hat.

"I've got one of those calls a man has to answer, Ruth," he said.

She only stared at him. Her lips were parted a little. She looked older; she seemed to be squinting at a bright distant light—the future, as like as not. Montana tried to feel sorry, but he couldn't.

Richard Lavery did the speaking. He said, "This will be about all, my lad. My girl has put up with a good bit. She's put off this wedding because of a hunting trip you wanted to go on; and then because you had to chase a wild horse. And now you're going down to face the challenge of a poisonous bit of scum called Jack Lascar. You'll forget about him, here and now, or else you'd better forget about Ruth."

"He's speaking for you, I suppose?" Montana said to her.

But she only kept on staring. One

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could not say whether there was more pain or fear in her eyes.

"It appears that I *am* speaking for her," said Lavery. "We know what we owe to you—but there's a future as well as a past to think of."

"Wait a minute!" said Montana. "You can only talk for yourself.—Say something, Ruth!"

"I can't," she answered. "If I try to talk—I'll only be weeping."

"People cry about things that are gone—finished. Am I finished as far as you're concerned?" he asked her.

She shook her head.

"I gave you a promise about the riding of the mare, and then I broke it. Does that make you feel that you can never trust me?"

"Do you trust yourself?" she asked.

This struck him very hard, apparently. He began to reason on her side.

"It's our wedding day—and I ride off. I'll always be riding off, Ruth. Is that what you feel?"

She was silent.

"I know," concluded Montana. "I can see it. What's left in you is mostly fear."

"I want to be braver and bigger," said the girl, "but I can't help it!—Oh, why are you this way?"

"Because the devil got into me between breaths, I suppose," said Montana. "You won't believe how my heart's aching for you, right now. You seem to me everything that's right and beautiful. And if I go away, the best half of the world will be behind me.—But I can't stay and be the happy cat by the fire. Even thinking of that drives me crazy. In the middle of the night, something would catch me by the hair of the head and yank me a thousand miles away into some sort of trouble! If we had children, you'd be counting them orphans, two or three times a year.—Ruth, I'm going away.—No matter what happens to-day, there's no coming back for me!"

HE took her suddenly in his arms. The tears began to run down her face, but she said gently:

"I'm not pitying myself. It's for you! I think God pities you, too—and loves you."

She lifted her face, and he kissed her.

Then he turned to Lavery and shook hands.

"I was hating you, a minute ago—But you're right," he said.

"There'll be another chance for me to show you that I'll never forget you," said Lavery. "If you'll still listen to me, I'll still beg you—"

But he checked himself. His unspoken words filled a beating moment of silence, and then Montana was walking jauntily down the steps and waving his hand.

"So long, every one!" he called.

Ransome began to make a mumbling sound, but he kept changing his mind about the words he intended to speak, so that none of them were clear.

Only the cook shouted out, as the Kid mounted, "I wish to God I had two legs under me, and I'd ride with you, Montana!"

Afterwards, as he sat the saddle, Montana heard Ruth crying out, "But he'll be killed!—Father, he's going to be—"

He let the sudden beating of the red mare's hoofs drown out that complaint.

As he came to the turn of the road, however, he felt an invisible hand tugging at his shoulder; and therefore he turned in the saddle, and at last he rode out of view with his hat waving over his head.

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Well, the girl feared him more than she loved him; and he loved her less than he feared a housed life. To see the spring and the summer and the winter show their faces always at the same spots, that was as forbidding to Montana as the thought of a prison cell might be to other men.

Now the house was out of view behind him. He let the red mare race to get through the pass between the hills, pointing toward far-off Bentonville. After that, he felt that he had brushed the hand of the past from his shoulder.

He began to laugh like a child. He had not realized how he had dreaded double harness until now, when he was started on the empty trail again!

CHAPTER VI.

GUN FESTIVAL.

IT was ten-twenty by his watch when he headed into the main street of Bentonville. That was cutting the time a bit short, perhaps, but he did not want to burn up Sally's strength with too hard a run. For, supposing that he met Lascar and survived the fight with him, he might need all the speed that was in the mare immediately. Gun fights were barred in Bentonville. A message had been sent to the sheriff, who was probably running a horse at a dead gallop right now to get back to the town in time to prevent this duel. And that same sheriff, solemnly, with carefully chosen words, had warned Montana that a single flash of a gun in his hand would be enough to land him in jail.

"This here new reputation of yours," the sheriff had said, "is a lot of pretty light stuff. There's plenty of honest citizens that claim you ought to be doin' time in the pen, right now. This here reputation of yours—why, it's so much dry powder, and one spark is gonna blow it to hell—and you along with it. No matter where your feet carry you, mind what your hands do after you walk into trouble. Maybe the other fellow will be to blame, but you're the one who'll go to jail."

It was curious, then, in a way, that Jack Lascar should have called for a showdown—a public showdown. Because there was nothing public about either the character or the past of Jack Lascar. He loved twilight and twilight ways, like a cat. A fight at mid-day in the middle of a street, was not Jack's usual procedure. One would expect from him rather a knife in the back or a bullet from behind. The man had plenty of skill and plenty of courage, but he used his talents like a red Indian. There was some mystery behind this challenge—or was it that the memory of that other defeat, that public shaming, had driven Jack Lascar into a frenzy, at last, until death was better than a life in which men smiled behind his back?

A freckle-faced boy ran out from a yard and up to Montana's side.

"Are you gonna do it, Montana?" he shrilled. "Are you gonna kill him? The sheriff'll chase you, if you pull a gun in this town!—Don't get yourself chased away from us, Montana. Everybody knows you licked Lascar once. Everybody knows you ain't afraid!"

"Things will be all right.—Thanks, brother," said Kid Montana.

The boy, panting, drew off to the side, shaking his head; and then he settled down into a steady dogtrot, to get to the appointed place in time for the meeting between the two men.

The street unrolled itself before Montana's eyes. He saw it as the sign of the old life which was now about

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to return to him. He smiled at the saloon signs. Back of them, he knew, were long, cool rooms in which the sour smell of beer and the sweet of whiskey were in the air; and farther to the rear were the smaller chambers where card games were generally in progress. In his gambling, the Kid preferred the crooked experts, partly because their pockets were always more full of money and partly because he never enjoyed winning from the weak. Above all, because equal chances made a keener fight that was worth the winning. Those back rooms had offered a hundred adventures in the Odyssey of Kid Montana's life.

The General Merchandise Store could outfit him for the desert or the mountains. In the blacksmith shops there were hands that were cunning in a thousand contrivances. But above all, behind this quiet village life, or stirring through it, were men of the right stuff—the hard fiber.

THEN he saw Hi Bailey's blacksmith shop in the distance, thin blue wisps of smoke leaking out through the big, open doors of the place. No horses were tethered in front of it, waiting their turn to be shod. Instead, the string was hitched on the near side of the place. Well, if bullets were to fly, horse flesh was as penetrable as the bodies of men. But the Kid knew himself and he knew Jack Lascar. There would be no wild shots in this fight!

No wonder the rest of the town had seemed deserted; all its life was concentrated here! The windows, the doorways, were filled, and people stood at the corners of the houses. A dull murmur rose, swelled into a many-throated voice. The rumbling came from men; women and children added a shrill note.

And suddenly the Kid was touched with scorn and anger. "Good" people are a queer lot. These people who were gathered here, such eager spectators for a fight, would also be the first to ride, at the sheriff's call, hotfoot down the trail after the winner.

The Kid smiled, but without mirth.

He looked down and saw that he was white with dust. He had stuffed his trousers into the tops of his boots, and dust was thick in the folds beneath the knees. City clothes, like city people, were foolish things, without the free flow of a range outfit or of range men. He made two deft, imperceptible gestures that assured him of the positions of his two guns.

Then he saw a slender figure walk slowly out from under an awning and step into the street with feet that lifted high, as though this man did not wish to kick the dust up over the polish of his boots. That was Jack Lascar. His bright Mexican jacket flashed dazzlingly in the sun.

"I'll put a red spot on that jacket," said Montana, softly.

He dismounted. The mare followed him, shying a bit from side to side as she kept seeing fresh crowds of humans on either side of the street.

Lascar stood in the exact center of the street, with his hands on his hips. There was no wind to furl back the wide brim of his hat and let Montana see the darkened face beneath. If there was only more light on the face, he would try his shot for the head. Well, he might try for the head anyway. The bright buckle of the hat-belt would be a neat target—neat and small. And Jack Lascar's rather bad chances would be evened a little.

Some one yelled, "Hurry it up! Hurry it up!—The sheriff's comin', hell-bent!"

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Out of the distance, Montana could hear the small beating of hoofs.

Jack Lascar had turned sidewise. He was not fool enough to offer the full breadth of his body to an enemy. He forgot that this turn brought the buckle of the hat-belt into fuller view.

They were twenty paces apart.

"How does this suit you, Jack?" asked Montana in a clear voice.

Lascar's whole body jerked with the violence of his words. He barked his curses like a dog. Any distance suited him, he said. Ten paces would be better.

The Kid smiled, and walked straight on.

A woman screeched through the thick silence that covered the town. "It's gotta be stopped! It's murder!—Two of God's creatures out there to murder—"

The voice was suddenly muffled. A man could be heard to say, distinctly, "Now, Mame, don't you go bein' a fool! The boys have gotta have their fun, don't they?"

The hoofbeats from the rear must have rounded a corner. They seemed suddenly nearer. That acted as a signal for Jack Lascar. The man seemed hungry for the battle, as he jerked out a gun.

The Kid made his draw in midstep. He fired as his foot struck the ground. Jack Lascar fired one bullet into the air, as he spun around. He fell neither forward nor back, but in a heap.

CHAPTER VII.

LANDSLIDE.

WITH Jack Lascar's fall there came from the watchers a deep, quick, animal sound. The lips of men and women and children grinned back suddenly as though there was something in the sight that filled them with the food of satisfaction and horror. After that first grunting noise there came the babel of spoken words, and an uneasy movement forward.

The Kid went up to Lascar's body and put his foot brutally on the man's shoulder, pushing him back so that he sprawled face up. Then Montana could see that a trickle of blood was still running down the side of his head—sure proof that the fellow was not dead as yet. Well, if that bullet had glanced, it meant that there would be more trouble — great trouble — ahead of Montana. For a man like him, with the courage to face his enemy in the open public, made him a man worthy of consideration.

There was something more to be considered, just now. That was the persistent beating of hoofs, down the street, and now rounding the last corner. So the Kid jumped upon Sally, looking back as he jammed his feet into the stirrups.

He saw the sheriff come grandly around the next bend of the street, with his mustang aslant, the dust spilling out sidewise from the slashing hoofs, and the wind of the gallop furling back the brim of the man's hat.—There was patience, kindness, understanding in the face of this man of the law, and long before he had shown all of these qualities in his dealing with Montana. There was also a bulldog persistence and that sort of courage which is found in a man who loves duty more than glory.

And as the sheriff saw the picture before him, the dust still rising above the place where Jack Lascar lay, the man of the law shouted. His cry was like the hoarse bark of a sea lion, as he went for his gun.

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Montana did not try to get away down the street. Neither did he open fire on the sheriff, for it was not his habit to shoot at the law-abiding. Instead, he sent the mare winging over a four-foot fence, and then crashing through tall shrubbery, which closed over man and horse like water.

The sheriff's bullets crackled through the brush, and other bullets sang a smaller and a higher note around the ears of Montana. He looked up, and saw a rifleman seated on the very ridge of a roof. The fellow had gone up there to get a perfect view of the meeting between Montana and Lascar. He had carried his gun with him, in case there was a chance for him to put in his hand safely at the end of the fight.

The Kid's lips twitched back from his teeth. There are a lot of people in the world who need killing! But now he had to swerve the mare onto a back lane and send her scooting. There would be plenty of trouble. He could hear its voice growling and howling through Bentonville. Now that the lions had finished fighting, the spectators would take part in a lion-hunt.

Horses began to snort and squeal under the spur as men mounted and drove away in pursuit. Men yelled orders in voices that squeaked with excitement. There was even a sudden discharge of three or four shots that could not have been aimed at anything in particular.

THE Kid smiled a little. His eyes filled with reminiscent pleasure. He knew all the instruments in this orchestra. He had heard them many times before. And the music assured him that he was now well out of the drowsy noontide of the commonplace and back in the chill wind of the world of adventure.

From his position, the south trail was the best trail. He went straight for it, taking note how the mare carried her head high, moving it in observation, keeping her ears pricked. She was iron-hard. The run from the ranch had not weighted her hoofs with the least weariness. She had found a master, and flown at last to a lure, yet she was still strong from those wild years of running through the wilderness. Montana felt that he had caught from the sky something that would carry him safely away from any earthbound dangers.

The last house, the last barn whirled away behind him. He was heading toward the beginning of the south trail, with the tumult of Bentonville drawing to a single head behind him. Then he saw a man on a black horse, riding furiously down the northern slope to head him off.

There was still time to turn to the left, down a broken ravine; but though he might avoid one enemy in this manner, he would permit himself to be trapped—trapped for that pouring crowd whose horses were beating up a thunder behind him. Besides, he was in no mood to turn for any man.

He drew a gun. The mare flowed beneath him like the current of a river; to shoot from her back would be as easy as shooting from the deck of a ship. And then he saw that the stranger had neither drawn a revolver nor unsheathed the rifle whose holster slanted down under the rider's right leg. It was a brown-faced Mexican, in overalls, with a tattered rag of a hat fluttering on his head. He was dressed like a peon, though he rode a horse fit for a king. Something in that contrast, and in the thick solidity of the fellow's shoulders, put knowledge into the Kid's eyes.

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"Rubriz!" he shouted.

For answer, he got a wild yell and the wave of an arm. It was Rubriz himself who pulled onto the trail beside him, checking the great black horse with a cruel Mexican bit.

"Welcome!—Well seen, El Keed!" cried Rubriz. "But take another way than this. The whole town is on horseback. They've seen me, and they're chasing me. Some dog of a spy has warned them that I'm north of the Rio Grande!"

The shouted Mexican speech was music in the ears of Montana. If he added up all the happiness of his life, at least half of it—and the spicier half, too—he had found it in the land of that tongue. He smiled as he answered:

"They hunt *me*, Mateo!"

"They hunt you?—Then they hunt us both!" answered Rubriz.

He turned in his saddle. Montana knew what the Mexican was seeing. The first riders out of Bentonville were lashing or spurring their horses, riding a race, with the wicked joy of the man-hunt maddening their heads.

What Montana looked at were the gross, powerful lines of the Mexican, and the white scar of the whiplash across his face. It would not have surprised him, at this meeting, if the bandit had leaped for his throat. Neither did it surprise him that Rubriz was ready to fight and die with him.

And seeing that, Montana's smile became a laugh.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Railroad Oddities

WHEN the locomotive was first invented, it did not occur to any one that smooth wheels would run on smooth rails. Most of the experimenters used noisy cogs; but in 1813 an English mechanical engineer produced the "Mechanical Traveler." This had legs and feet like a horse. It wasn't a horse, though, as the inventor realized when it blew up.

The early Louisville-Lexington line was called the crookedest in the world and was intended to be that way. In order to run with as few conductors as possible, the builders provided frequent turns so that a conductor could look back over the cars. The idea was to make sure that passengers behaved themselves. Kentucky also had a two-story train at one time.

The Victoria Bridge over the St. Lawrence River was called the eighth wonder of the world, and consisted of a long tube through which trains ran. The tube was made of sections which contracted when the weather got cold so that two or three feet of the center section were out of sight in below-zero weather. It was a popular sport to walk through the bridge, hoping that no train would show up. One ingenious man of Montreal fixed a pointer to the center tube in such a way that it would show how cold it was—people marveled at the bridge that was its own thermometer.

China's first railway was relished by the coolies, but not by politicians, who pointed out that the noise and smoke disturbed ancient burying grounds. The people said: "That's so," and went on riding back and forth just for fun. In 1876 an official of Shanghai, hearing that the governor of Formosa wanted a railroad, had the local line picked up and shipped there.

J. W. Holden.

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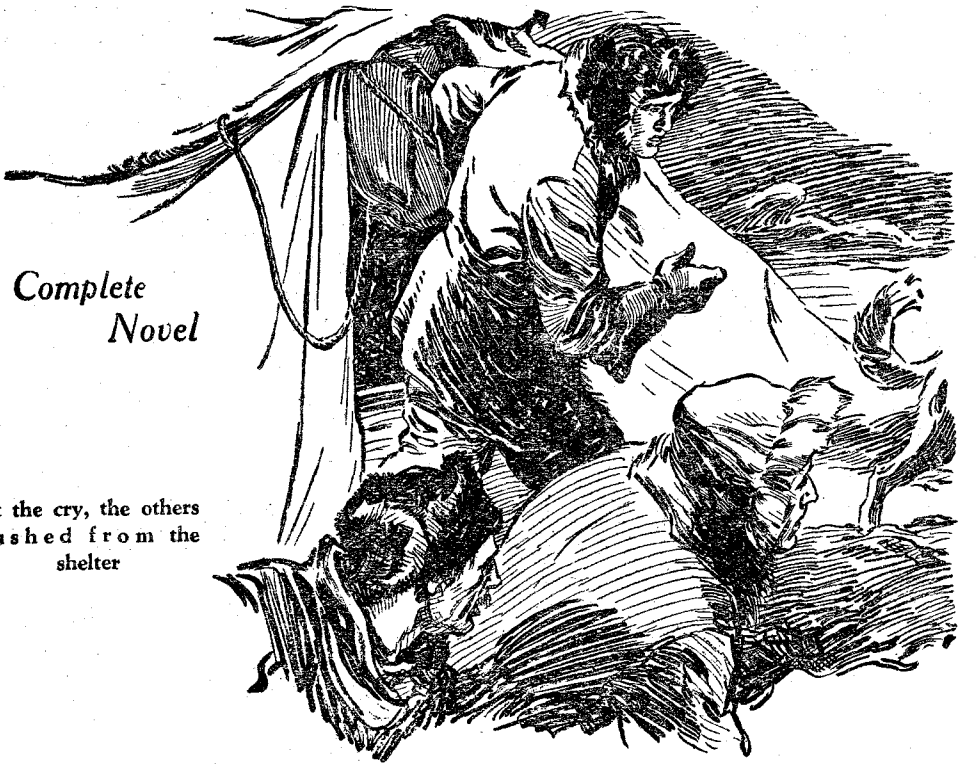
Frozen Gold

By JACK ALLMAN

Author of "Skin Diver," "The White Eagle," etc.

"The closer a man gets to the Pole," said Harvey Jackson, "the nearer he gets to the fires of hell!"

Complete Novel



At the cry, the others rushed from the shelter

CHAPTER I.

DISASTER!

THE phonograph had blared out only the first four bars of a song when the door leading into the ship's choicest quarters swung violently open. Harvey Jackson, leader of the Century of Progress Polar Expedition, stepped quickly over the high threshold.

"Shut that off!" his voice rapped out with the abruptness of a military command.

Boatswain Gowd, standing beside the instrument, did not move. A heavy scowl rode his bewhiskered face. His teeth showed between his thick lips. One elbow rested on the top of the phonograph. The hand was beside the switch which he had just turned on.

"We decided we wanted some music," he said, nastily.

"Shut it off. You know the rules."

Jackson took a couple of steps out into the combination lounge and dining saloon. Every muscle in his lean six feet was taut. The purposeful lines that drew his face into square angles made him look older than his thirty-two years. His gray eyes, flashing out from beneath

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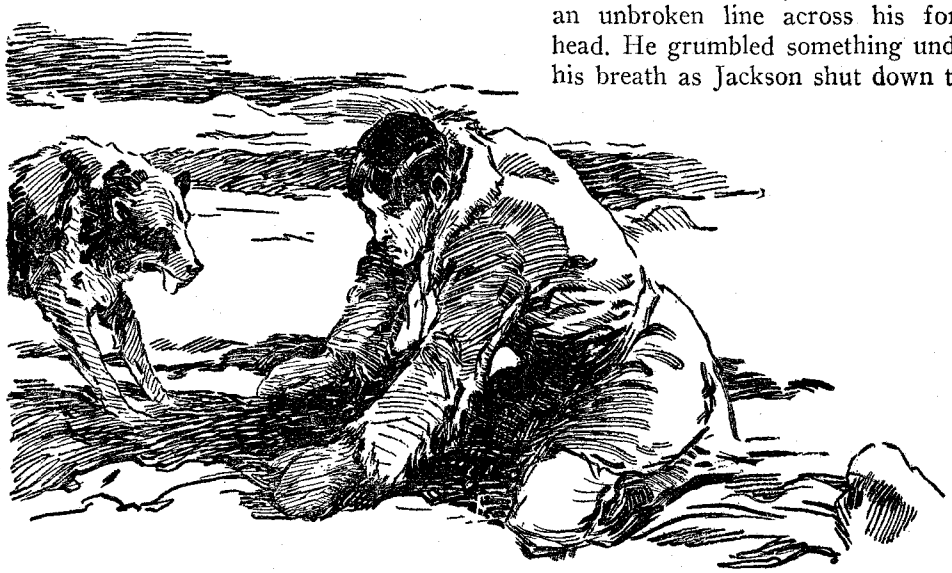
a jet-black foretop, were angry and determined.

"Did you hear me? Shut it off!" he repeated.

Gowd did not move till the leader was almost upon him, then he raised a clenched fist.

"Leave it alone, Jackson. We want music."

He grasped Jackson's wrist and shoved the hand away that was about to throw the switch back. In another moment the two men were standing toe to toe, slugging. Heavy blows crushing solidly into hard flesh sounded above the music.



"The golden woman!" he babbled

Men at the tables stood up the better to view the fight; their checkers, chess and books forgotten.

Jackson's hard fist caught Gowd on the point of the chin. The boatswain crashed back against the phonograph, and the needle jumped a few bars but the iron strap that held the instrument firmly to the bulkhead withstood the shock. Gowd couldn't get away from the second piledriver blow; he crumpled to the floor.

A door on the other side of the lounge flew open and a heavy, looseknit figure appeared.

"What's going on here?" he demanded to know. Then, as he recognized Jackson, "Oh, you again, eh?"

Jackson jerked a hand still clenched into a fist. "Sit down, doctor. I have something I want to say to every man on the ship."

He ran a quick eye over the assembled faces, then sent a man to call two who were absent.

Gowd got glumly to his feet. His thick, reddish-brown eyebrows formed an unbroken line across his forehead. He grumbled something under his breath as Jackson shut down the phonograph; and in obedience to a gesture from the leader, slumped into a seat.

JACKSON stood at the head of No. 1 table and rested his knuckles on the red-and-white-checked cloth. Fifteen pairs of eyes rested upon his face. Some of them were bright with anger; others were filled with understanding. The latter, however, were by far in the minority.

"Men," he said, "it isn't necessary for me to tell you again that *I'm going to run this expedition*—and when I say

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run it, that's just what I mean. I'll brook no interference from either the scientific body nor the members of the crew!"

"Aw—a little music ain't going to hurt nothin'."

A big, rawboned seaman rubbed the back of a tattooed hand across his nose.

"That isn't the idea," snapped Jackson. "You fellows all know the rules. If you don't, read them." He jerked his head to indicate the bulletin board on the forward bulkhead. "Wednesday nights, we have music. Sundays, the film which was donated—one reel each week. Saturday nights, we listen to the short wave.—That, with the free use of the games and library, is the sum of our entertainment. And those are my orders."

He stopped and let his gaze swing slowly the length of each table. It slipped quickly over the four scientists, who sat together; but it rested for a second on Dr. Dreen, who had dropped into a seat at the crew's table. And it bored into Gowd's scowling eyes.

"Those are my orders," he repeated, "and they're going to be obeyed."

The last was added with slow and weighty emphasis on each word.

He swung on his heel and entered his quarters. Fralic, the naturalist, put his book away in the rack and left the lounge.

A number of the others followed suit. Those at the crew table kept their seats.

"Nutty idears Jackson's got!" said the sailor with the tattooed hand.

"Crazy as a loon!" added the ship's carpenter.

"Must think we're children or somethin'," grumbled Gowd.

The doctor said nothing, but he studied each man's face through narrowed lids. He knew that, like himself, their dispositions were chafed raw under Jackson's severe rule. And like him, they resented taking orders from a man who was younger than themselves. Younger, yet strong and fearless enough to make even the toughest among them bend to his will.

THERE was one at the table, though, who thought differently. Gust Alquist, who had been quartermaster under Jackson on a previous trip into the Arctic, was loyal.

"He's right," he insisted. "I was with Jyllborg when we were frozen in for twenty-five months. No moving pictures or radio then, either. We got three records of music once a week. A man would go nuts if he didn't have something to look forward to. I know; I've been through it. Look at Nansen, who froze in deliberately and tried to let the currents carry him over the pole. Look at Amundsen, out three or four years at a stretch. They all hold things back; they never let their crews get tired of what little recreation there is."

"Yeah, we got somethin' to look forward to, ain't we?—Another winter!" Gowd was bitter.

"Well, he's the boss. And he's got his mind made up to go further into the pack, now that we're afloat again."

It was Dr. Dreen who spoke, and the disgust on his face told plainly how he felt about it.

"Nutty idear!" repeated Gerlach, the sailor.

The carpenter's sentiments were identical. Alquist merely shrugged his shoulders and left the others to their arguments and opinions. Hardly had he left the lounge when Jackson reappeared. Dreen, certain that the others were with him, challenged the leader's judgment in sailing north through the lane of open water. Jackson's impatient answer effectively closed the subject. He was going on into the pack, in search of the land they had set out to find. He had little patience with those who felt that the trip was over, after they had been frozen in for thirteen months.

After Jackson had left for the deck, the doctor took Gowd, Gerlach and the carpenter into his cabin. Warily, Dreen

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felt his men out. When he was satisfied that he could depend upon them, he outlined his plan. All conversation was in whispers. And when they were ready to leave, Dreen patted each one on the shoulder.

"Fine, boys!" he said. "That's the way she stands. If we can get enough of the men with us, I'll pronounce him insane. The rest will have to abide by my decision, as the only medical officer here. Then we'll lock him up and turn the ship around. Save a lot of stink when we get back. They can't ask a man to follow a crazy leader."

The men left to feel out their shipmates, and the doctor rolled into his berth to dream of a quick return to civilization—and of something more important. His vindictive nature feasted upon the fine manner in which he was going to square things with Jackson.

His grudge had started with a reprimand when Jackson had found him drunk on the whisky which had been shipped as medical supplies. It had grown into enormous proportions, during the year they had been held prisoners in the ice. In the morning, provided Gowd reported a majority, mutiny, under the guise of medical edict, would change a serious scientific expedition to the polar regions into a farce.

MORNING never came, however, in the sense that Dr. Dreen looked forward to it. At four o'clock, the angry Arctic struck at the expedition with his ice-mailed fists. His insane breath swept down across the wastes, and shattered the heavy armor of the frozen seas, splitting it into floes the size of farms or counties or states. It bordered them with mile-wide ribbons of black water; and then the gusts of the Arctic's insane laughter closed the open leads again.

Weather whistled through the standing rigging of the ship; drove sheets of freezing brine up over her blunt and iron-sheathed bows. It slammed her against the edge of the solid ice field till the three-foot thick side groaned under the impact. It bent the streamer of smoke sharply over the top of her one funnel, and whipped it off at a constant level above the ice.

Jackson was everywhere at once. His bellowed orders were torn, half-spoken, from his lips by the screeching gale. He snapped on the search light and bored a hole of light through darkness that was filled with flying snow crystals. Only the dark water, filled with floating brash ice, glinted in the beam.

The edge of the other floe cut a line across the platter of light. It was as solid looking as a curb of granite, and coming slowly toward them. The lead was closing!

Jackson swung the light around to the floe to which their ice anchors held them. Then, at his shouted order, men ran out with arms loaded with prisms of guncotton, with fuse and fulminate caps.

Detonations sounded above the howl of the storm, as shot after shot was fired in an attempt to blow out a cove large enough to keep the ship from being crushed.

Even with the powerful explosive, however, the desperate efforts of the men seemed puny and futile.

And Jackson knew that when the Arctic rages, the will of man is impotent.

"Break out pemmican — arms — ammunition — sleds!" Between words, he threw dogs over the rail onto the ice. "Get the bedding off! Primus stoves! Fuel!"

ALQUIST, who had taken over the search light, threw the beam out into the water for a second. The lead was narrowing fast. As Jackson swung up the ladder to the bridge, he followed the beam back with his eye. The shots of guncotton were biting into the ice, but they'd never get a large enough cove blown out in time.

The bulky figure of Dr. Dreen blocked his way at the top of the companion lad-

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der. Jackson shouted, but the other didn't seem to hear. He stood with his hands gripping the high rail, and his face, in the light from the wheelhouse, was pasty white.

"Get your stuff off! Everything! We'll be needing it!"

Jackson's words were almost shouted in Dreen's ear, but still the doctor didn't move. He was frozen with fright.

The leader grasped him around the waist, lifted him off his feet, and turned. He loosed his hold, and the doctor slid to the deck below, landing in a heap. Then he scrambled to his feet with a curse.

"Maybe you'll listen, next time I give an order!"

Jackson repeated what he had told Dreen to do. He turned to Alquist.

"How fast is she coming?"

"Like a racehorse," said the quartermaster. "Four-five feet a minute. She's almost on us. Brash is packing, too."

An extra heavy charge of explosive burned a bright cone up into the ice-filled air. A man screamed, and Alquist swung the light beam. Two of the men on the floe lay stretched out. When their companions dragged them out of the way, dark streaks of blood marked the paths.

The reverberations of the shot came back on the wings of the gale.

"This is the end of her, Gust!"

Jackson darted through a madly swaying door. He snapped over a knife switch, and a motor under the bench-like table groaned.

Slowly it picked up speed. Jackson's eyes were glued to the mounting hand of a dial.

Another switch clicked over. His tense fingers closed on the key. With accurate speed, the dots and dashes of International Morse went out into the storm-torn night, telling any who might pick it out of the air that the Century of Progress Polar Expedition was about to lose its ship. He gave their position as Latitude 76 degrees, 24 minutes, north; Longitude 173, 34 west. He repeated it twice, then closed the key and listened.

NOTHING came. An endless minute passed.—Two.—And nothing but the howl of the wind and another charge of explosive.

Alquist came barging in.

"She's on us," he shouted.

Jackson waved him away, one ear bent to catch the first click that would tell him that his message had been picked up. The ship gave a shudder.

Jackson grabbed up a small emergency set.

"Get the speaker.—Where's the log?"

"Got it," said Alquist.

The heavy ironbark sides of the ship groaned mightily; then, slowly, they gave under the tremendous pressure. The deck buckled up under their very feet as Jackson and the quartermaster reached the rail.

The search light's beam died suddenly. Gust jumped to the ice. Jackson followed, struck a rough spot, and slipped. The whole weight of the hand set fell on one instep. Somehow, he got to his feet and hobbled off into the inky blackness, away from the crushing ship.

He fell again, over boxes of stores. Behind him he heard the heavy timbers of the boat being snapped and splintered.

Under his feet the ice split, but he felt a steadying hand on his arm, and heard Gust's deep voice in his ear.

Men were shouting, some place ahead. Dogs yelped. A huge flame came into life as some one touched a match to a blanket, soaked in stove oil. They raced for it, Jackson hobbling painfully.

Behind them the lead was almost closed.

The noise of the two floes coming together was deafening. Where they welded, a great pressure ridge rose fifty to a hundred feet high. In the last flicker of the burning blanket, it looked like a miniature mountain chain.

The fire died away as the black heavens echoed back the thunder of that

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mighty collision. The darkness was intense. The ice became silent once more, but the wind continued to scream. By feeling on hands and knees, they found the two injured men. It was too late to do anything for either.

They sat around, humped up with their backs to the storm, for there was nothing to do but wait for daylight.

Jackson was next to his friend, the naturalist.

"Fralic," he said after a long silence. "For me, this is the terrible end of a dream. When we started, I planned great things. They were dreams. From now on, it'll be nightmares. My job now is to get these men back alive. And it's not going to be easy."

Fralic nodded. "I know," he said, simply.

Jackson was too close a friend for him to say anything more. His slight frame shuddered at the thought of the responsibility that was now the young leader's.

The echoes of another lead closing came to them on the wings of the racing wind . . .

CHAPTER II.

MAROONED.

THE black storm was still tramping down across the ice when slow daylight came to show the silent men that things were even worse than they had first thought. The supplies hadn't been moved far enough from the ship, and most of them had gone with the crush.

Burying the two men who had been killed by the explosion was the first job; then came an inventory. All the dogs had been saved, though Jackson's favorite leader had a crushed foot. But one sled had escaped smashing, too.

They had a few cases of Underwood pemmican, some rice, beans, and hard bread. There were two primus stoves and two small drums of fuel, an assortment of pots and pans, one tent, and a large tarpaulin.

Fortunately, early on the trip, Jackson had instructed every man to save his rifle and bedding, if anything happened; and the cases of ammunition had always been stowed where they were handy. They were lucky on that score, for Jackson, remembering the time the Karluk crushed, under Captain Bob Bartlett's feet, had insisted upon just one type of gun for all. He didn't want to get caught with salvaged 30-40 Winchesters and 6mm ammunition, as Stefansson's expedition had.

Two shelters were set up at once. The cook got busy with one stove, in the tent where the crew lay out their duffle. The other was used to heat the water with which Jackson dressed the wound on his instep. He, together with the doctor, the scientific unit, and Gust Alquist, used ice blocks and the tarp to form a sort of closed shed.

The hand generator set was brought in and warmed up over the stove. A frantic search showed that the coil of aërial wire was among the material that was missing; but at last they found a short piece that had been used in repairing a broken sled bent. Gust grasped the handle, and soon worked the geared rotor up to speed which lit the 7½-volt tube. Then Jackson clicked off his message.

Eager faces crowded the shelter flap. Not a word was spoken.

Minutes passed, and another try was made.

Still nothing came back. Silence, except for the howl of the wind and the low hum of the rotor as Alquist dropped his speed back just enough to keep the '32 receiving tube lighted up.

"The aërial's too short."

Jackson's verdict sent every man on a hunt for another piece. One by one they came back shaking their heads. Gowd roared curses, forgetting that it was his duty to see that essential equipment was first off, in case of accident,

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and that it was to be moved to a safe distance at once.

"Get everything in shape for a start," said Jackson. "Gowd, you and Gerlach see that the dog harness and sled is in repair. Dreen, you get after Brandy's foot." He nodded to the old malemute leader, lying on the foot of his sleeping bag.

"Fralic, I'm appointing you to apportion the food supplies. Divide it up, man and dog alike."

"We share with the dogs?"

Dr. Dreen's question was put to Jackson angrily.

"Right!" said the leader. "Man and dog alike.—And it'll have to last for forty days. If we don't reach Barrow by the first of November, we'll never reach there.—Every man packs his own, too. That way, there'll be no thieving or accusations of partiality. It'll be all the dogs can do to handle the stoves, fuel, bedding, and the rest of the stuff! They'll have to be fed, too; and I intend to see to it that they are. Of course, if we get polar bear or seal, it'll be easier; otherwise we'll probably find ourselves getting along on four or five ounces a day.—Now every one snap into it—and make your grub up into packs, as soon as it's issued to you. Save out enough for to-night only. We start without breakfast in the morning."

"So we pack while you ride, eh?"

Gowd shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

JACKSON was up on his one good foot in a flash. He reached out and spun the boatswain around.

"Did I say anything about riding?"

Gowd grumbled something under his breath, and Gerlach led him away. The tension slacked off, and the others breathed more easily. This was no time for petty misunderstandings, for the slightest incident of the sort might have serious consequences.

Gowd, they knew, was an ex-whaler like Gerlach, and both had reputations as good Arctic men. But there had been strange stories about the boatswain. As the sole survivor of an ill-fated cruise for "bone," in earlier days, he freely admitted cannibalism, though he stoutly denied murder. Nevertheless, there were those who said he wasn't to be trusted too far.

As the others filed out to their various tasks, Jackson said to Fralic, "The one thing we're going to need is harmony!"

The naturalist said he'd do his best to try and maintain a spirit of "pull-together" among the men.

Dreen gave a half-snort. He looked up from the bandage he was tying on Brandy's foot.

"Every man better do his share, then," he said. "I can see Gowd's point." He turned to Jackson. "You can't walk on that foot."

"No? We'll see about that. Our lives depend upon those dogs, and they'll probably pull every toenail off, in a few days, if we hit many pressure ridges. They'll be skeletons in a couple of weeks.—We'll all be sharing their suffering before we get back; the only difference is that I'll be starting mine in the morning. I'll walk, same as every one else."

He went out to supervise preparations.

The day was spent in getting things into shape, and then they had their warm meal. Every one used his grub pack for a pillow, and all prepared to sleep early. Dr. Dreen made quite a show of the work that he was doing. He took his medical case and went out, explaining that there were frostbites and injuries among those who had made up the ship's crew.

IN the morning, Jackson was first out. But he stood frozen stiff as he stepped through the flap. The other outfit was gone!

Brandy lay a few feet away, clubbed into insensibility. But he was not dead; he could be brought round, Jackson saw.

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They hadn't wanted the dog, on account of his sore foot; nor had they taken any chance of his howling when his teammates pulled away.

Jackson's shout awakened the other leaders. Dreen's sleeping bag was also gone.

Fount, the oceanographer, and Rolf, the meteorologist, both grabbed up their guns. Fralic stuffed shells into his pocket. Burke, the geologist, sat stunned into silence.

Gust and the leader both shook their heads.

"Never be able to follow their tracks, even if it was possible to overtake the dogs. Storm's too tough.—Foolish to try," said Jackson.

It was a serious conference that took place, there in the shelter, half tent and half igloo. With the motive power for hauling the equipment gone, it was useless to try and reach Barrow afoot. There would be open water that they would have to skirt. The mileage would be piling up. Without dogs, they could never make it.

"And just when I had a notion, too!" said Jackson. "It occurred to me while I was trying to go to sleep last night that perhaps we could make an aërial out of our combined watch springs."

Fralic's hand darted to a pocket on his belt line.

"Mine was hanging on a hook over the berth," he said.

The others, except Burke, admitted that theirs, too, had been left behind in the excitement. The measurement of time hadn't seemed important to them then.

"Just a goofy idea," remarked Jackson. "Anyway, it's out now."

They discussed their position.

As the leader put it, "Our best bet is to stay right here and conserve our strength. If even the rankest amateur caught my message from the ship, just before she crashed, it would be relayed. There will be an attempt at rescue—probably by air."

Burke was all for action. He wanted to try and overtake the others. Jackson refused to argue with him, but Fount used less judgment. The resulting near fight put them all on edge. It was finally agreed that they would each take a spoke of the wheel—using their camp as a base—and try to bag game that would lengthen out their food supply.

JACKSON found himself alone with Fralic, a few minutes later. They looked at each other with that strange, intangible sympathy that sometimes exists between men who are physical opposites.

"Fralic," said the leader, "it really doesn't matter, I suppose.—Nothing matters so much.—Only a man can't see something that he's set his heart on, go like this—not when I stop to think that many lives depend upon my snap judgment."

He fell silent. His head dropped into his hands. When he looked up, there was a patient smile on his face; and it was not time for any kind of a smile.

"But listen, Fralic," he said, almost tenderly. "I might as well tell you the truth. I told you that this trip would be easy; that it would be like a ride through Central Park. You don't know it, of course, but it's going to be hell from here on.—No, don't look down at the toes of your mukluks. I'm telling you! You don't know what happens to men, out here on the ice. You can't know. You've never been in a jam like this before. It'll be hell, I tell you! More hell for some than others. It'll be—"

"What?"

Jackson hesitated. He didn't want to say what was in his mind.

He might never have said it had it not been Fralic who put the words in his mouth.

"I know," said the naturalist. "I know what you mean. You mean me, don't you?—You're talking about me?"

The leader's eyes ran quickly over the

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slight, almost boyish figure of his dearest friend.

"Yes, Fralic!" he admitted.

Fralic tried to laugh. It was tragic; a hopeless attempt to pass the whole thing off as nothing.

"Don't laugh, Fralic!" Jackson begged as he got up quickly and stepped to the flap. "I'm afraid you can't make it. You haven't—"

Fralic gazed at his back.

"The nerve, you mean?"

He laughed again, and this time it was worse than the first.

Jackson was already outside. He didn't hear, or he might have corrected the other's supposition. What he meant was that to stand the Arctic it took men who could look death in the eye without blinking. He knew that Fralic was brave, but he also knew that the naturalist would think too much.

Jackson had been marooned before. He had seen his companions starved into a rancor of hate that grew slowly into premeditated murder; murder that meant nothing, for both killer and victim were facing death anyway.

He knew that men did strange things when the last minutes of full life were ticking away. He had seen the listless expression that creeps into men's faces after too many weeks of brooding silence, after too many months of gazing at a monotonous, ice-fringed horizon—searching for the first glimpse of help that would probably never come. And he had seen that same listlessness turn into raving madness when the sun left in the fall—and hope went with it.

Yes, Harvey Jackson knew what happened to men in the Arctic. Perhaps that was why he so often said:

"The closer I get to the Pole, the nearer I come to the fires of hell!"

THE next day, each man took his appointed route in search of game. Jackson limped painfully, but he covered his course.

The first day brought them nothing, and though this didn't surprise either him or Alquist, they tried to make the *cheechackos*—the new comers—feel that they were certain to bag something shortly.

The following morning, they were just about to leave when Brandy set up an excited yelping. He clawed at the closed flap, and they all fell silent. There was the unmistakable crunch of footsteps on the frozen and drifted snow outside. A mittened hand grasped at the triangle of canvas, pulled it back.

There stood Dr. Dreen. His loose, bulky figure moved quickly in, and he stood swaying on his feet. His eyes were wild. His arms shot out, and he held his hands out pleadingly.

"They got away!" he said. His voice was pitched even higher than its usual tone. "I tried to overtake them," he said. "I saw them go—I followed them."

He looked from one to the other of the faces that gazed back at him.

Not a word was spoken for a second, then Fount said, "Oh, yeah?"

"You don't believe me?" Dreen's voice came two tones higher. "I tell you *I saw them go!* I followed, but they got away from me!"

Burke openly accused the doctor of having conspired with the others, calling attention to the fact that Dreen hadn't made any attempt to awaken them, and that he had also taken his own bed.

"Gowd probably figured you were useless, and so he deserted you as you tried to desert us," he said.

Vehemently, Dreen denied this.

"I tell you they were leaving when I heard them! I had no time to call you fellows. I tried to follow.—For God's sake give me something to eat! I'm starved."

He continued to try to convince them, as he ate of the food which the leader gave him.

Fount dropped back into the silence that all the rest preserved.

"I followed them, I tell you!" Dreen

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kept repeating. "But they got away from me." His wild eyes moved in jumps from face to face, rested at last upon Jackson. "You believe me, don't you, Jackson? You know I wouldn't try to sneak away like those rats?—You believe me, don't you?"

"No!"

Just the one curtly spoken word and Jackson walked outside.

A WEEK passed, and it was a trying week for the leader of the marooned group. He wondered if he had made a mistake in choosing to stick. A plane could have been there in three or four days, from Fairbanks or any other Alaskan airport. He felt better when Alquist was positive in his assertion that they could never possibly have made land afoot, with a fresh storm blowing up nearly every day.

"Even if our message didn't get out, they may investigate our continued silence," said Jackson. "If we can keep the *cheechackos* from breaking, we can stick it out for quite a while."

Alquist agreed.

They continued their daily hunting; and fortunately, though they had to give up portions of their bedding in order to make up an outfit for the doctor, Dreen had returned with his rifle.

Deep lines grew in their faces as time passed and their rations ran low. They fell to sitting around in moody silence, except for short, heated quarrels which Jackson was forever breaking up. Fount and Burke were continuously at loggerheads over every point brought up for discussion. Rolf opened his mouth only to complain, while Fralic kept his own counsel and took things as they were.

Dreen was exceptionally irritable, and time after time, he asked Jackson if he didn't believe that he had followed up the crew for the purpose of making them return with the dogs. But he got either complete silence or a negative shake of the head for an answer.

Gust and Jackson watched the different characters as they developed, and nodded their heads understandingly. Both knew that men can't hide their souls when cold, hunger and hopelessness are their daily diet.

The hunting continued, and the first reward was a white Arctic fox that Jackson brought in. The warming stew did wonders for the morale of the outfit, though Dreen caused a terrible rumpus when parts of the carcass were fed to Brandy. He was all for killing the dog so that he wouldn't have to be fed.

"Might be a good idea to keep him for a while, anyway," said Fount. "I understand dog meat has saved men's lives."

Dreen snorted. He'd be damned if he'd eat dog!

"You would if you knew your life depended upon it," said Jackson, quietly. "I have—and was glad to get it."

He reached down and stroked the malemute's wide, flat head.

"I think I'd pass you up, old fellow, though," he said. "Too much of a pal! I'd never have seen that fox against the snow, to-day, if it hadn't been for you."

THAT was the last that was heard of killing Brandy. If he was a help in hunting, he could easily earn his share, for the days were shortening rapidly, and the search for game cut down accordingly.

At the time of the crash, during the storm which usually appears with the Autumnal equinox, on the twenty-second of September, they had their twelve hours of daylight, the same as every other spot on the globe at that time. It took just a month, at their latitude, for the sun to disappear entirely.

Nevertheless they made their daily, shortened trips. Then, one day at noon, the boreal gods went on a rampage again. A screaming wind swept down across the ice, one of those "black blizzards." One by one, the members of the party returned to camp. Jackson arrived to find Fount, Burke, and Rolf huddled

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over the primus stove. To save fuel, they had it turned down so low that it hardly burned at all.

A few minutes later Dr. Dreen came in. He was whimpering like a child, frightened half to death. The end of his nose was white, and he had frosted his chin; but he got little sympathy from the others.

Fount was gritting his teeth against the pain of returning life to the fingers he had tucked into one armpit. Rolf called the doctor a baby, and told him to get to bed and shut up. There wasn't enough spunk in Dreen even to resent the remark.

Alquist showed up, and reported that a fresh lead had opened up to the north of them. He said he had known there was a storm due, and had prepared for it when he left that morning; he had put on his caribou fawnskin shirt, for the first time that fall.

"I suppose you've got a barometer hidden away some place!" snorted the doctor, sarcastically.

Gust didn't answer. He'd been laughed at too many times for telling of dreams and visions. He believed in them; why be made a fool by trying to convince some one else? Jackson smiled to himself. He knew all about Gust's superstitions and self-deceptions.

"WONDER where Fralic is?" Jackson said in an effort to change the subject.

"Probably tracking down an ice worm or something," retorted Dreen. "These naturalists give me a pain! He spent half his time, the first week we were here, studying the flight of those birds to the south. I lost interest in them when I found they were out of rifle shot. What'd you bring him along for anyway? He's just another mouth to feed."

There was anger lurking in the depths of Jackson's voice when he answered.

"Dreen," he said, "there were a number on this expedition that I wouldn't have brought along, except for their existing contracts. When I took over command, at the invitation of the backers, I was filling the shoes of another who had taken ill, as you know. He had chosen his crew by measure of brawn instead of manhood. You saw what they did when it came to a showdown."

"Yeah. And every man in the outfit here probably had the same idea in mind. You know the old saw, 'Self preservation . . .'"

"And there are limits even to that. Every dollar I ever hope to own goes to say that the thought never entered Fralic's mind. That's why I insisted upon having him along—because I know he's dependable; and because, as the greatest living authority upon migratory birds, he would probably have been able to plot out with a fair degree of accuracy just where this land out here that they nest on lies."

"Bunk!"—One of Dreen's favorite expressions when he didn't have an answer ready.

"Perhaps," said Jackson. "But you'll notice that chance enters very little into discovery to-day. It's science — and you'll usually find that a scientist is a pretty capable and regular fellow. Because you happen to represent a branch of science, I'm not including medicine in that last remark."

In angry silence, the doctor ate his food, and then crawled into his sleeping bag. The others sat up, waiting for Fralic. The temperature dropped rapidly, and the breath of the silent, watchful men turned to ice on the canvas roof of their shelter.

About ten o'clock, Jackson made a torch of the fox skin, soaked with oil.

"I'll take it to the top of the ridge and light it," he explained. "Just in case he hasn't holed up in one of those pressure caves and is hunting for the camp."

The mad wind beat at the flame, and it soon burned out. Jackson waited, and nipped two fingers trying to keep his eyelashes thawed apart. He shouted helplessly into the roaring, ice-laden tempest.

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At last he returned to the shelter and they all turned in.

CHAPTER III.

THE GOLDEN WOMAN.

HUNTING was out of the question till the storm abated. A tedious day dragged up to a dull, lingering dusk when Brandy's ears came up and he whined to be let out. Jackson opened the flap, and a strangled cry broke from his throat. The others rushed out.

There was Fralic, on his hands and knees. White spots the size of silver dollars were on his cheeks, and his nose was like marble. His lips were black, where he had sucked the frost from them and they had come back to painful, swollen life. A moan escaped them; a moan that came from deep down inside him. It was ghost-like.

He had lost all power of his legs, and they dragged after him like the hind quarters of a wounded animal. His caribou skin breeches were worn through at the knees and there was frozen blood on the flesh that showed. The hood was back from his parka and strings of his hair were glued with frost to his forehead.

There was a light in his eyes as he lifted one hand in the air, as though asking Almighty God to spare him further misery.

He had been drooling at the mouth and it had frozen.

"You should have seen her," he blubbered as they gathered around him. He stabbed out toward the east with the hand he'd been holding up.

Jackson brushed the hand aside and swept the pitiful figure up into his arms. Alquist held the flap back.

"Shall I get in with him?" volunteered the quartermaster as Jackson lay Fralic out.

"No, I will. Turn up the stove a bit while I chafe his wrists. Here, you others. Get his mukluks and breeches off."

He rubbed the blue wrists briskly.

Fralic looked up. His eyes were open, but they were out of focus—blank eyes. His head lolled. He talked like a man in a dream.

"I saw her!—I touched her!—A woman! A beautiful golden woman!"

"There, there, old man! Take it easy! Just lay back and take it easy."

Jackson's voice was as soft as a woman's. For a second it looked as though Fralic recognized him. His eyes sought the face above him, but they looked right on past, as though there was nothing there to rest them on.

"I touched her with my hand," continued Fralic. "This hand.—And she was gold!"

He relaxed suddenly, and lay still. Jackson dropped an ear to the man's chest. He rolled back an eyelid. There was a tear on it, where the frost had melted.

HE helped the others, and they soon had every stitch of clothes off Fralic and had him tucked into the reindeer bag, with its lining of eiderdown. Jackson then stripped to the skin and crawled in with him.

"That's a new one on me," said Dreen.

"Safest and quickest way to thaw out a man who's dangerously frozen," said Gust.

"Better get a hypo of morphine ready," suggested Jackson. "He's going to suffer the tortures of hell when that frost starts coming out and his circulation starts again."

Fralic never moved, and it was hard to tell whether he was breathing or not. Jackson shivered as he lent the warmth of his body to his friend's chilled flesh.

"What in hell do you suppose he meant—a golden woman?" Rolf broke his silence to put the question.

"Crazy as a loon," replied the doctor, without hesitation.

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"Funny how quick a man can break." Fount shook his head sadly.

Burke nodded and clamped his lower lip a little tighter between his teeth. The four men who were new to what the Arctic can do to a man were probably asking themselves the same question—Was this what was in store for each of them? Were they all doomed to go like this?

Silence filled the small, low room of ice and canvas. Jackson's eyes met those of Alquist. Neither spoke. They didn't have to; they had seen too many things together; had been through too much before, and had seen each other come out of it like men should. That was one reason Jackson had refused to take the boat out unless he had with him what he considered the best Arctic ship man in the world.

As leader-captain and quartermaster, the two had seen men break like sharply struck icicles. They had seen the thread of reason snap, from many causes, but never from exposure. Men either froze to death, or else they thawed out and got over the experience. Sometimes they lost limbs, but never did their minds give way. It was long periods of starvation, hopelessness and monotony that made men go crazy. Witnessing things like this didn't help matters, either.

IT wasn't long till they saw that Fralic was doomed. The needles of frost had drilled to the bones of his fingers, killed the life in his feet, and mounted half way up to his knees.

Jackson felt pretty bad about it. He had been the cause of Fralic's coming, and he felt a personal responsibility. He stayed at camp and looked after his friend, therefore, while the others resumed the hunting, after the storm passed.

For long hours Jackson would sit in the dim light beside Fralic. He'd hold his hands, and watch them slowly turn black. There were times when Fralic would look up, with his eyes centered upon Jackson's face, but they were glazed eyes; glazed and dead looking. Yet there was no light of insanity in them. Sometimes his lips would move and Jackson could see them from the words—"Woman! Golden Woman!"

But usually no sound came. Then, one evening when they were all there, Fralic seemed to come back almost to complete consciousness.

". . . Been there two hundred years, I guess. And I touched her . . ." he spoke, almost inaudibly.

The whispering had started out with a mumble, and it ended the same way. He dropped off into a coma again, not even realizing that he had spoken.

"I wouldn't be so cocksure of that insanity business, Dreen," said Jackson that evening, in answer to another of the doctor's remarks. "Fralic saw *something* out there on the ice, and I'll bet on it."

"Saw a woman, I suppose?—A golden woman?" There was ridicule in the short laugh that the doctor added.

Jackson shook his head.

"Just the same, that last remark of his didn't sound like a crazy man to me. *Two hundred years!* Where would he get that?"

"I'm asking you."

Jackson didn't answer. He brushed the hair back from the frost scars on his friend's forehead.

"Mirage!—Bet that's what he saw," said Burke.

"Mirage while a storm's on? Use your head!" Jackson tossed aside a nail that had fallen from one of Fralic's fingers.

"Hallucination is the word," supplied Fount. "That's more like it. Fabricated vision, recorded upon a mind that's gone haywire."

"Just plain crazy, in simple words, then," said Dreen.

"Right," agreed Rolf. "Stark man, I would say."

Gust Alquist had nothing to say. He had seen things, too, but he was reticent about speaking of them. Ignorant crews had laughed at him, and learned men had

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argued with him, but the only change it effected in him was to make him keep his mouth shut. Sometimes, when he was alone with Jackson, he talked of the ghosts and shades he had seen. But Jackson neither laughed nor argued.

A FEW days later, while Jackson was alone with him, Fralic took a quick turn for the better. A kind of luster came back into his eyes. He raised himself to his elbows, looked long and intently at his hands. He turned them and examined the dead flesh. He turned his head toward his friend beside him.

"Jackson . . ."

Then he paused. His eyes closed and his lips moved silently.

"Come on! Buck up, old fellow!" said Jackson. "Don't let it get you. We'll pull you through all right!"

He knew that he was lying, for when Fralic opened his eyes, Jackson saw that incomprehensible calm that comes over a brave man when he knows that death is near.

"Listen, Jackson." Fralic's voice was weak, but it was clear—clear and sane. "I'll never get back. I'll stay here. This is the end. I'll be—I'll be . . ." His frost-burned forehead wrinkled, then a slow smile came to his lips. He quoted from Service:

"Frozen stiff in the ice pack,
Brittle and bent like a bow;
Featureless, formless, forsaken,
Scented by wolves in their flight.
Left for the winds to make music
Through ribs that are glittering white."

His eyes opened, wide and clear. "That's the way I'll be, Jackson," he said.

"Hang onto yourself, old fellow! Don't get to feeling that way."

Fralic smiled a little. "You've been good to me, Jackson. I've appreciated your friendship, and—"

He paused then for breath, and Jackson heard the death rattle.

"Fight it, Fralic!" he said. "Fight it! Don't think about yourself.—Talk! Talk about anything! The girl back home!—Anything! Tell me what it was you thought you saw out there on the ice. What about this golden woman?"

He had seen the gradual relaxing of Fralic's muscles, and he tried desperately to awaken some interest that would make the man fight. His words had the desired effect. Jackson saw in his friend's pain-racked features the awakening of a vague, elusive memory. Fralic was trying to recall something that had deserted his tortured mind; he was groping for a vision he had seen while frozen into a half-stupor.

He tried to speak. Failed. Then he licked his lips, and whispered.

"The golden woman! Yes! Did I tell you about her?"

In his excitement he sat bolt upright. He swung a swollen hand to indicate the north.

"She's out there. Looking out over the cursed ice as she has been for two hundred years. I couldn't believe my eyes, but I—I . . ."

He fell back. He gasped. His teeth gritted. Fralic was fighting now; fighting hard to hang on.

JACKSON coaxed and pleaded, but there was never another word. A vacant look crept into Fralic's face. His breathing fell away. He gave a little shudder, then lay still.

Jackson's lips moved in silent prayer. Then he rested his chin in his hands and tried to find an answer to Fralic's words. He'd swear that his friend was sane; as sane as he was himself. Insane men don't quote poetry.—What was the answer? What had Fralic seen? Surely, not a copper-skinned Eskimo. Anyway, there weren't any natives this far from the mainland. There never had been.

No. It couldn't be that. They were further out upon the ice than any one had ever been, in this longitude. Not even the aviators had passed over this part of the frozen ocean. Wilkins and

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Amundsen had both flown a course further to the east.

What had Fralic seen?—Or was all this the workings of a twisted mind? Was the doctor right after all?

Jackson rose and stepped out through the flap. There was an annoying lump in his throat, and he recalled all the good things he knew about his friend who lay stiffening in the sleeping bag.

Unconsciously, his eyes turned to the south. A tiny segment of the sun was just peeping over the horizon of endless ice. While he looked, it slipped back out of sight, its hollow, heatless rays brushing low clouds. He glanced at his watch. Noon. That was the last of the sun, then, and it had taken Fralic's soul with it.

Jackson shook his head as he stood there. There were trying times ahead. He'd be lucky to keep his little party safe, alive and sane. Men did strange things when there was no sun to light their lives. And Old Sol wouldn't return until about the middle of February.

Fralic, his pal, was gone for good.

AS though in mutual agreement, the death of the naturalist wasn't even mentioned, during the weeks that followed. Jackson knew that nothing he could say would convince the others that Fralic hadn't been mad. He made it a point, though, to do all his hunting to the north. Gust took a region to his left.

A lead opened, and a seal fell to one of Jackson's bullets. The blubber was tried out, and from the cleaned skull the leader made a serviceable lamp, using a piece of heavy underwear for a wick.

Dr. Dreen took the attitude that the oil was worth more for food than for lamp fuel. Burke and Fount felt the same way about the matter. Rolf had nothing to say, and neither did Jackson and Alquist. They both knew that light is necessary to a man's mental welfare. All along, they did whatever they thought was best and refused to argue. Jackson laid down the rules. Gust saw to it that they were obeyed.

As the temperature dropped, every man was made to beat the frost from his clothing before entering the shelter, for Jackson wanted no cripples from frostbite. He was particular about the food, too. Scurvy was something to avoid, if possible, though all the doctor's supplies had been taken by Gowd's gang.

Jackson made each man eat a bit of pemmican each day. The compressed and concentrated food of dried meat, cereal and fruit somewhat relieved the diet of straight meat.

Things settled down to a routine in which every day was alike except for the Sunday rest, when they improved their time by washing and mending clothes. The single needle was always in demand, and every man furnished his own thread by unravelling the tops of his socks.

With the sun gone, dispositions took a decided change for the worse. Fount and Burke argued all the time now. Dr. Dreen's loose features took on a look of habitual bitterness. Rolf drew back deeper into his shell of moody silence, though he came out occasionally whenever a discussion got under way. Even Gust Alquist flew off the handle once or twice; something rare for him.

Jackson kept himself well in hand. There were times when his companions tried him almost to the end of his patience. He had spells when he would have liked nothing better than to clench both fists and start swinging right and left, but he always fought back the impulse.

Discontent grew, as it became increasingly apparent that their radio message hadn't been picked up by a station. Many times, Jackson was taken to task for not having at least made an attempt to lead them back to land when the days had been longer. He held his temper with difficulty, and made no excuses, simply saying that he had acted upon his best judgment.

One morning he said to Gust as they started out, "There is a clear, full moon, and I don't think I'll return at dusk. It

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will give me a chance to get into fresh territory, instead of hunting the same region over and over again."

"We'll stick close together, then," said Gust. "I'll stay out, too. We can find a good cave among the upended blocks, in an old pressure ridge some place. It'll be more comfortable, if we sit out the night with our backs together."

They wandered long after the steel-gray dusk had given way to the brilliance of the clear, cold moon. Game was discouragingly scarce. Not even a track rewarded them.

They holed up on the lee side of an ice ridge. A brisk wind grew, during the night, and whistled monotonously through the pile of jagged blocks over their heads.

In the morning, they wandered still further afield.

IT was a little after noon that Jackson turned to see Alquist running toward him. He looked for a bear, thinking first of an ice-jammed gun, but there was nothing chasing the quartermaster.

Gust was a solidly built Swede, with a colorless beard and ruddy cheeks. Now, as he puffed to a halt, Jackson saw that his face was as white as death. His blue eyes were round and wide, his teeth chattering. He looked more like a badly frightened child than a capable navigator in his late thirties.

He pointed a trembling hand, in answer to Jackson's hurried questions. He had a hard time getting it out, but finally he made it understood that he had seen the woman.

"The one that Fralic saw. And she's gold, like he said. She's the figurehead of a ship like I never saw before.—It's a ghost ship."

Jackson ran for the low ridge to see for himself. Brandy scampered on ahead, while Gust kept a cautious distance behind.

At the top of the ice comb, the leader stopped dead. He didn't shake and his teeth didn't rattle, but he stood speechless with wonder. There, just as Alquist had described it, stood a ship frozen in a smooth patch of old floe. It loomed dark and sinister against the white background. The only touch of color was the golden woman, up under the bowsprit.

As he started down the slope to investigate, Gust's shout stopped him.

"Don't go near her, Jackson!—Don't! I tell you she's haunted!"

Jackson turned. There was a query in his eyes, and Alquist hastened to explain.

"I was standing right over there when I saw her first. I couldn't believe it was a ship. Then her bell struck. It struck three times."

He was talking fast, and there was earnestness in his voice. He pointed a stiff finger at Jackson and he leaned forward.

"You won't believe it, but it was just *half past one!* Yes, sir! One-thirty, and the bell struck three times. I shouted, but no one answered. I went down there and called again. No one answered. But that second port in the after cabin swung open."

Jackson knew that Gust was absolutely honest in what he was saying, but he put it down as imagination. He shook his head and continued to work his way down the ragged slope of the ridge.

"It's a ghost ship!—Manned by ghosts, I tell you!"

Alquist's voice rose to a screech.

JACKSON kept on. If it had been any one else who called after him like that, he'd have put it down immediately as a mind snapping under tension. But he knew Gust so well; knew all his beliefs in supernatural phenomena and so on.

He smiled to himself, but the smile quickly froze. The square port that Gust had pointed out suddenly swung violently open. He could hear the squeek of the hinges above the whistling of the wind. He stopped short again; looked

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the ship over as though trying to convince himself that it was really there.

He had to believe his eyes. It was impossible for an ancient high-pooped ship like that to be frozen here in the Arctic. Yet there she stood.

He felt the hair on the back of his neck bristle. Slowly he moved over toward her. Even Brandy seemed a little cautious, the way he sniffed of the vessel's stem.

Jackson stepped up under the figure of the woman. He reached out and touched her. She was gold—heavy sheet gold, pounded over a carved form of wood. The small, depressed dots that were the pupils of her eyes gazed out over the frozen seas; gazed straight into the north.

Gust had descended from the ridge, but he was standing away at a distance. He cocked his rifle and pulled it up at alert as Harvey reached for a short length of chain that swung from the port cathead. He backed up a few paces.

Jackson suddenly drew his hand back. The clear, unmistakable tone of the ship's bell came from far aft. It struck once, then twice in quick succession. There was a moment of silence, then another strike. It wasn't a seaman-like manner of striking four bells, but it was the mark of two o'clock, nevertheless. And it had been just about a half-hour since Alquist had heard the bell.

A feeling such as he had never experienced before crept over Jackson. He shivered, yet it wasn't from the cold. What in the world was the matter with him, he asked himself? It was out of the question for any one to be alive on this old Eighteenth Century ship. As out of the question as it was for the ship itself to be here.

He took a firm grip on himself. A man has to believe his eyes when they are backed up by his sense of touch. He certainly wasn't going to start believing in ghosts at this late age.

He slung the strap of his rifle over his shoulder and grasped the dangling chain. In another second his foot found rest in the deeply cut billet scroll. He pulled himself aboard.

Alquist was standing down on the ice like a frozen image.

AS Jackson stood there on the raised forecastle deck and looked aft across the low waist of the ship to its towering poop, a queer sensation passed through him. She was a craft such as he had never seen before, but he had seen plenty of illustrations of her kind. He had dreamed over them as a lad, when pirate stories made better reading than the dry books handed out by wealthy parents and headmasters at exclusive private schools.

The picture would have had men on the decks. He could see them now. One with a patch over his eye would be holding a cutlass aloft while his men loaded the carronades that would bring the fleeing East Indiaman to a halt. Another, with a bandanna around his head, would have a knife in his teeth. And perhaps there would be one with a wooden leg, and a couple of big pistols stuck in his sash.

He had eagerly read of these sea rovers and had accepted it all as so much exciting history. He had even wished that he might have been born at that time so he could share the excitement of chase and capture. It had all been very real.

But to be standing here on the deck of a pirate ship in the frozen Arctic—that was hard to believe! It was impossible! Freebooters always grabbed off their prizes along the rich sailing routes in the south. And yet here she was—and she must be a pirate. Merchantmen, privateers, and ships of the line didn't carry golden figureheads.

Unconsciously, he raised his eyes, as though he expected to see a Jolly Roger flying at the mast head. But there were no masts. Fore, main, and mizzen lay across the deck, with their ends hidden in the ice. They had all been broken off

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short by the force of the Arctic gales, after flying snow and ice crystals had worn away her standing rigging of hemp.

With a wave of his hand to Alquist, Jackson dropped down the short ladder to the waist. He passed a longboat, griped and lashed over spare spars, and he noticed that edges of frayed canvas showed on the coaming of the battened hatch. Coils of running gear hung from the fife rail, at the stump of the mainmast. It was worn from continued swaying.

He found that the sliding door to the high cabin over the quarter-deck was blocked by snow and ice. He broke it away and entered. In the pale light that came through the portal, he saw a skeleton at a table. His blood ran cold as he investigated further.

CHAPTER IV.

SHATTERED HOPES.

AT the end of a half-hour, he rejoined Alquist. He carried the ship's log. He had been through the boat, and he told Gust about it as they hurried to camp.

"That bell got my goat for a minute," he said, "but I found it was nothing more than the wind. Same with the shutter. It was the only one not locked from the inside. It's the one in the master's quarters, and his skeleton's there. He shot himself. The log tells about it."

Gust was still skeptical about the wind. He kept glancing apprehensively over his shoulder, as they strode off through the early darkness for camp.

When they arrived at camp, an argument that was just about to wind up in blows was in progress. Rolf and Dr. Dreen were making an issue of the childish matter of whether this was Thanksgiving Day or not. It was quickly forgotten when they heard the news.

The three men looked at Jackson and Gust as though they were certain that they were crazy. Only the log book convinced them of the truth. Dreen laughed and cried by turns, in pent-up hysteria, when Jackson told them that there was food on the old ship. The others sat and listened with rapt expressions on their tired and worn faces.

"The log gives a list of what she had in her hold," explained Jackson. "She was pinched before she froze in and filled to the level of the ice that held her up. She's a solid block inside.—The stuff will be good when we dig it out. Bound to be."

He opened the book at the beginning. "Her name is the Golden Ladie," he said, and spelled out the old-fashioned manner of writing the name. Then he read, slowly because of the manner in which it was set down:

"Barque of foure hundred tonnes burthen, and mounting eighteen guns."

She was the property of a Captain Ackley who had no doubt been a better pirate than a scholar. Dinner was forgotten, as they read the old record of the voyage. The date was given as June, in the year 1780, on the first entry.

"A HUNDRED and fifty years," said Rolf in his thin, high voice, charged with awe. "Think of it! And that writing as plain as the day it was set down!"

Jackson nodded. "Been in darkness all the time, and things without native moisture don't decay in the Arctic."

"What do you mean, don't decay? You said there were skeletons."

Dreen had control of himself again, and he was always ready to snap Jackson up on anything he thought a debatable point. He could never quite get over the fact that while the leader had no college degrees, his knowledge of the sciences was astounding, and that his advice was often sought by others who were famous in their fields.

Jackson's answer was curt. "The hu-

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man body, as I recall having read some place, is slightly over ninety per cent moisture."

"Anyway, the grub will be all right if it's been frozen all this time," ventured Fount.

"Sure," said Burke. "Only about four years ago, they found the carcass of a prehistoric mastodon, frozen in what had been a mud slide. Its flesh was eaten and pronounced good. Scientific experiment, of course. That baby was thousands of years old."

"Every time I turn around, up in this damned country, I learn something that knocks me for a loop," spoke up Rolf. "Things that couldn't happen any place else on earth. You know, it don't seem strange to me that an old pirate ship is preserved in the ice, now that I think of it."

"It shouldn't," said Jackson, "not after you listen to how it happened to get here."

He skipped hurriedly through the log till he found something he had read back there at the boat. The record was full of action, from the time the Golden Ladie had sailed from Anilla Harbor at some unnamed island in the West Indies. It carried her around the Horn, and told of a prize she had taken near Juan Fernandez. There was an account of the long run to the island of Luzon, in the Philippine group, which he read aloud:

"To get all the sundry treasure burryd there by the Chinese Mandarin, Chan Lee Suey, when His Majestie's troops captured Manilla in 1762, and the whereabouts of which is known only to one Abner Potts who sails as second officer in this voyage of The Golden Ladie."

There was an account of the loading of the treasure, and a lengthy description of a man-of-warsman or privateer which chased them till

" . . . a God sent fog which came in answer to our prayers and pleadings permitted us to effect escape."

Captain Ackley evidently decided that it would be too dangerous to try and run the blockade of gunboats and others which he had reason to believe would be standing off the Horn waiting for him.

"And the fleete would no doubt seaze our vessell. So I have lade a Course threw the North West Passage. The same as shewn by Captain James Cook of His Majestie's Navie three years gone by. He was stopped by Ice, butt as the Seasons are reversed there will be Ice and Winter at the Horn these months while there will be full Summer in the North. Also the distance will be only a little more than half as far."

The date of this entry was May 10th, 1781.

"That's just what happened to him," nodded Rolf. "He got up through Bering Straits, and the ice closed in on him."

"And the currents have carried his floe intact up to this point. You know, Nansen froze the Fram in deliberately, in 1893, and tried to drift across the pole."

"And to think that she is right near here, so that she can save our lives! Maybe we'll be able to find wire on her for an aërial. We'll have grub to eat till help comes," Fount raved on enthusiastically.

FOOD was forgotten, as they browsed through the interesting old record of a pirate's adventures. Ackley was a thorough business man, and he had everything itemized. There were in his hold: *"Barrs, baggs and chests of gold,"* each listed and weight given. The explorers tired of trying to keep it added up in their heads. There was *"coyned gold,"* also. Sixty thousand Spanish gold *pistoles,* twenty-two thousand English gold guineas. There were numerous caskets of both polished and unpolished gems. Special mention was made of the most valuable pearl necklace in the Orient—the one which Chan Lee Suey had purchased from the Sultan of Sulu.

There were *"Bailes, Books and Parsells of Silk Rumals and Bengall, calli-*

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coes and muzlins." Numbers were given of the casks of oil, tallow, rum and wine. Of the quantity of sugar, spice and coconuts. Of ". . . *the fine salted porke flesh in barrells that were in the Spaniard at Juan Fernandez.*" And of a ". . . *palatable and nourishing fruite called 'Midshipman's Butter,' and is not only good to eat butt is serviceable as grease for the capstan and small blocks.*"

There was little sleep at Desertion Camp, as they called the place, that night. It was almost morning when they crawled into their bags—each to his dreams.

The strain was broken for Fount, Burke, and Rolf. They were normal, for the first time in a long spell. Dr. Dreen, in the silence of his mind, forgot his jealous hatred for Jackson, and his promise to himself as to what he would do to Gowd when he got hold of him. Instead, he dreamed of the wealth of gold and jewels.

To Gust Alquist, it was just another—but novel—way of getting out of a tight spot. He had faced death too many times to get excited over being saved. What worried him most was whether or not it had really been the wind that had struck the bell and swung the port open.

Jackson looked upon the whole affair with more sane judgment than any of the rest. To him, it meant hope to fulfill the responsibilities that were his. Now he had a fair chance of getting his men back alive. One thing worried him: copper wire was scarce, at the time when the Golden Ladie had been fitted out. For the life of him, he couldn't remember having seen a bit of it aboard her.

They were a tired but eager bunch, when daylight finally came. It was a job, getting everything moved, but the task was at last accomplished. Gust was the first aboard, after the leader. His first question was to ask if everything looked as it had the day before. Had anything been moved?

With an effort to keep his face straight, Jackson assured him that nothing had been touched since they had last been there. He gave orders for every one to make a thorough search for copper wire.

THEY started in the large gallery that had served as a sort of a wardroom for Ackley and his officers. With lamps that hung in their gimbals from the overhead decking, they scoured the ship from stem to stern, and from the level ice that filled her hold to the upper works.

At last every nook and cranny had been dug into, and Jackson gathered them together in the wardroom.

"We will continue to search," he said in a voice that carried little hope, "but we will have to watch our oil. There seems to be no supply other than what fills the lamps. We will need light, in order to dig out food from the cargo."

"Food," grumbled Dreen, "isn't going to do us much good. It'll just prolong our misery, that's all. What we need is an aërial."

"I think we all understand that," snapped the leader.

"There's the way we end if we don't find it."

Fount nodded to indicate the skeleton which Jackson had seen sitting at the table. It was upright, in a huge hand-carved chair, with skull and arms of bone fallen forward. They rested on some sheets of paper that proved to be a letter to Maggie Potts, in Deptford, England.

Rolf picked them up and read aloud from them. The writer stated that he was dying from ". . . *the dread dizease called scurvie, of which there is none worse.*" He and the master alone were left of the personnel of ninety-four men.

This bore out Ackley's last entry in the log, which said that all were gone except himself, and that he couldn't face it any further alone. A hole through the skull testified that he had taken his own life, in his finely fitted quarters.

"Best way out," said Burke. "I can understand how easy it would be, to just

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stick a muzzle against a temple and pull the trigger."

"Now listen, men," said Jackson quickly. "Let's not lose hope altogether. Let's get at that ice filled hold. As long as we can find food, we can live, anyway."

"Until scurvy takes us, eh?—Why wait?" Burke turned and walked away.

Jackson made up his mind to keep an eye on him.

THERE was a rude forge and some charcoal in the armorer's workshop, and Jackson shaped some tools on a block iron anvil. By the smoky light of one lamp, they chipped with them at the black ice.

When a week passed and nothing had been found, nerves started to give way under the strain. It was too much, to be so rudely disappointed after all their freshly kindled hopes.

Still Jackson kept them at it. Dig, dig, dig! Then carry the chips to an open gun port. At night they ate in glum silence, at the table in the wardroom. It didn't take them long to give their tired and weakened bodies the daily ration. When they were finished, each crawled off to his bed.

One night Jackson happened to look up suddenly. He was sitting in the chair, at the end of the table where the skeleton had been, and Dreen was at the other end. The doctor's eyes were boring into him, a wild, weird look in them.

"Cut it out!"

Jackson's nerves, too, were taut.

The words jerked Dreen's loose figure erect. A twisted smile contorted his face.

"You know what I was seeing?" he asked. He pointed a trembling finger. "Your skeleton, Jackson—your skeleton. You were sitting right there where the other one was, only your head was back. There was a hole—a small black hole—right in the middle of your forehead. I could see it plainly. Even the bones looked like you!"

For a second no one moved. Then Burke struck the table with his fist. Slowly, he got up from his bolted-down chair. Every eye followed him as he stepped to the door of the cabin which he had chosen as his quarters. He reached out for the bronze mermaid that was the handle to the door. It was a half-groping gesture, such as one might make in the dark.

"Burke!"

In a couple of quick strides, Jackson had a hand on the geologist's shoulder. The other turned. He opened his tightly closed lids, and they drew back from eyes that were wet and glistening. In their soft brown depths was an expression more befitting those of a woman. A slow smile came to his sunken cheeks, and he patted the leader's shoulder.

"Don't worry, Jackson! I'm sticking!" He stepped over the high threshold. "I'm sticking!"

The door closed. Jackson retook his seat. A dead, tight silence fell over the group.

Outside, the wind whistled mournfully around the wide, flat stern transom, with its deep carving of seahorses and dolphins. Brandy jerked his legs and gave a low whine as he dreamed of some bygone chase.

ROLF was the first to speak. His voice was low and choked.

"Just a few days now till Christmas," he said. "Gee, I wish I was a kid again!"

It didn't seem strange to the others when he said that. They, too, had been busy with their thoughts.

Jackson studied the faces around the board, and he asked himself questions that couldn't be answered. Would any of them ever get back alive, or would this old ship be the tomb of these modern adventurers, as it had those of a century before? What would the end be? Which would be last to go? Some one would have to be last; there always was a last.

He weighed the cost of scientific ex-

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ploration in the Arctic. Was it worth the candle? Sir John Franklin and his two ships, with a hundred and twenty-eight men aboard; Professor Andrée and his party; the men who were lost at Herald Island; and those who had gone to search for Nobile! Hundreds of others. Those who had entered the frozen world with Greeley—with Peary—with almost every other expedition—and who had remained.

Was it worth all those daring lives? Was the data they had gathered on this trip worth to future generations the price of a man like Fralic, or the two men who had been killed by the explosive—and the cost that was still to be paid?

One by one, the men left the table for their beds.

IT was a big day when Jackson's improvised pick uncovered the first cask of tallow. Other stuff was brought to light, too. Feverishly they dug, and the end of the wardroom filled with stacks of food and supplies. There were wooden drums of oil for the lamps; kegs of molasses and of rum. Barrels of pork, in its original brine, and a cask of heavy red wine. All cereals in frozen bags were left where they would not thaw. Round shot, powder kegs, and other useless articles were also left below.

They had a banquet, that night, and they drank wine from golden goblets taken from a chest which had been dug up. Dreen grabbed for himself a battered, but beautifully chased chalice. Burke, whose religion made use of the symbol of the Holy Grail, took exception to such sacrilege. But the doctor only laughed, filled the cup to the brim, and tossed it off in one great, gluttonous gulp.

Upon Jackson's suggestion, they ate and drank sparingly.

"Our stomachs won't be able to stand sudden overloading," he explained.

He refused to issue rum until after they were finished, then they sipped it as they sat around and talked. And for the first time since they had boarded the old ship, laughter was heard. They joked and they told stories. Jackson was the quietest of the group, for once, when Rolf had thrown back his head and parted his lips in hearty mirth, he had caught a glimpse of the meteorologist's red and swollen gums. The curse of scurvy was upon them! And the leader knew that though the specter of starvation had disappeared, slow and certain death still hung close above their heads. There hadn't been a thing in the recovered food that would act as a preventative or cure of scurvy.

From the happy atmosphere of a child's birthday party, the conversation gradually swung around to seriousness. They discussed the possibility of their silence being investigated, but they held out to each other small hope that they would be found, even if a rescue flight was made.

They were fast in the ice, but they knew that the great fields shifted position in slow but steady drift.

"Perhaps some day some one will find us as we found Ackley and his crew. Our records will make interesting reading. Look at the stir August Andrée's notes caused, when they were turned up," said Fount.

"They lay there on the beach of White Island for only thirty-three years. If they could survive under those conditions, imagine how long our records might last.—Forever." It was Rolf who always took the scientific side of things.

"Think of the value of that Golden Ladie log book," said Dreen. "Worth plenty."

"I wasn't thinking in terms of money value," snapped back Rolf, "I meant historical interest." He leaned across toward the doctor, and all the hatred he had developed for the medical man shone in his eyes.

"I hope I'm the last to go," he said tensely. "I hope I'm last. What I put into my records about a certain double-crosser who got double-crossed will make a nice evening's reading for any one. I'd

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like to make certain that it's left to be found."

DREEN was out of his chair. Fear, the same fear that had been in them the day he came staggering back to Desertion Camp, was again in his eyes.

"You lie!" he shouted. "I didn't leave with them.—You lie!"

The wine flush had disappeared from his cheeks. He was trembling.

Rolf gave a short laugh. "If you aren't saved, the world will be a lot better off."

Dreen lunged, driving out across the table with a huge fist. The blow landed square on Rolf's mouth, and he fell back. Jackson and Alquist grabbed the doctor and forced him into his seat. Fount took care of the other scientist, and reported two teeth knocked out. He didn't know, as the leader and Gust did, that those teeth had already been loosened by scurvy.

The trouble put an end to the evening's festivities. They all turned in; but first, Jackson called Dreen to his quarters and motioned him to sit down. The doctor was a little drunk from the wine and rum, but he was sobering up fast. When he talked it was with nervously clipped words.

"If we do get rescued, you won't let them say that, Jackson?—You can't! It isn't true! You believe me, don't you? You can't let them say I tried to run away with the dogs and then had to come back."

Jackson waved an arm. "We aren't saved yet. You're probably worrying needlessly. But if we do get rescued, the men can say what they wish, so far as I'm concerned. I've never muzzled a man yet."

"But think what—!"

A wave of the hand silenced him. "I didn't call you in here to discuss that," said Jackson curtly. "I called you in here to tell you that Rolf has the scurvy."

Dreen blanched. "*No!*"

"You're a doctor; you should have recognized it. And you certainly know that where one gets it the others soon follow. We're all eating exactly the same food."

"*Scurvy!*" The doctor couldn't seem to get it through his head. "*Scurvy!*" he repeated. "And they took all my cloudberries when they ran away from me!"

Jackson's eyes narrowed. If there had been any doubt at all in his mind about the truth of the doctor's story, it was now gone. The inadvertent remark was tantamount to a confession that he had been of the party with Gowd and Gerlach. He tightened his lips and threw open the top of a brass-bound chest.

"This is Ackley's supply of medicine," he said. "I can't hope that there is anything that will act as an anti-scorbutic here, or else he would have used it. Make sure, though. The names on some of those flasks are too deep for my knowledge of modern medicine. See if there's anything there we can possibly use."

Dr. Dreen dropped quickly to his knees and examined the contents of the chest. When he arose he shook his head.

"Nothing. Tincture of agueweed, Friar's balsam, cures for King's Evil, scrofula and junk like that."

Jackson did not observe him, however, as he dropped a small stoneware vial into his pocket.

"It's going to be hell to stand around and watch them go," said Jackson.

CHAPTER V.

WORD COMES THROUGH.

JACKSON ordered Rolf to stay in bed, and then he called the others into his cabin.

"It is almost certain to be fatal," he said, in explaining what they faced. "Our only chance is that there might be lime juice or something of the kind that was frozen in where Ackley and his

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men couldn't get at it. Perhaps too weak to dig or something. Maybe they didn't know its value."

He took the log. "Here's the entry I refer to," he said, and read aloud:

"The pressure of Ice against our sides has caused the Timbers to spring and we are making water so that it takes twenty men each two glasses to keepe it out.

"Here's the next," continued Jackson. "He says that it is hopeless to keep her dry, as the cargo stowed on the orlop deck is already flooded. In stowing limes or fruit, he would have put them below the water line, on account of the tropic heat through which he sailed. It's up to us to get down there and find out what there is."

The idea took every one's fancy, and they tore at the ice in desperation. In looking for a 'tween deck hatch, they uncovered most of the treasure. Day after day, they chipped away and at last came upon the cargo below. They found the baskets of what Ackley had termed midshipman's butter—nothing more than the commercial avocado or alligator pear of to-day.

The fruits had blackened from slow decay, probably before the hold had been flooded, and were useless as food. Next, they came upon some hides; and after that what appeared to be small arms, taken, no doubt, from a prize. Jackson pulled out a heavy case and pried the lid off. He chipped away some of the ice.

"I've got it!" he cried.

The others dropped their tools and crowded up.

"What is it?—Limes?"

"Are they still good?"

"How many?"

Jackson shook his head. "No, nothing for the scurvy—but look."

He held out a cutlass of shorter and heavier make than those used by Ackley's men. He pointed to the leather hand grip, which was bound around and around with light copper wire. They were all the same; and there were ten of them.

Fount grasped one, and started unwinding the thread of verdigris-covered copper. Others did likewise. Within an hour, Gust had the aërial up and the rotor of the hand set turning over. When the tube lit, Jackson clicked off a message.

Only an occasional groan from Rolf's room broke in on the hum of the set.

THEN there came a series of snaps in the diaphragm of the loud speaker. No one breathed. Jackson had his ear almost in the small horn. Every eye was on his face. It was expressionless. But suddenly the sound took on the form of jumbled, indistinct speech. Jackson straightened up and looked at his watch. He looked at the dial.

"2RO, and I'll bet on it!" he gasped.

The tension was broken. The wardroom filled with excited speech. Dreen again reached a stage of near hysterics. Tears came to Fount's eyes; tears of emotion that he tried hard to control. Burke was silent, as usual, but his lips twitched as he smiled at Jackson. Gust stood alternately picking at his thumbnails or chewing at his hempen mustache.

The lines of strain seemed suddenly to be erased from Jackson's face. His expression was one of tremendous relief.

"Yes, sir, 2RO, or I'm mistaken," he said. "It's near their wave length—25.40 meters. And Rome's time on the air, too."

He reached for the dial.

"Get an American station," said Dreen. "Tell 'em to come and get us. Hurry up, and quit fooling around!"

Jackson looked up. "I happen to be doing this," he said. "Suppose you relieve Gust, there on the crank. Nothing from the U. S. on at this time."

A little manipulation brought out GSD, at Daventry, England. It came in loud enough to be heard if all was quiet, and heads were held close. The program

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was a musical one, but there was no time for music just now. Again and again, Jackson sent out his call, but no answer came.

"Let's see if we can get a little more wire, and we'll try again later. Just a few more feet will do it."

A moan from Rolf's room interrupted him. He stepped into the cabin. When he came out, he softly closed the door. He nodded in answer to the questioning looks . . .

They buried the scientist in the ice, and Gust made a small cross from parts of the ship's deckrail. The wood was as firm as the day it had been installed, and it had been sandpapered to the smoothness of satin by flying snow crystals. With the aid of old-fashioned tools from the ship carpenter's chest, Alquist did a beautiful job of the grave marker.

THINGS became strained again, when it was found that there were no more cutlasses from which to get antenna wire. They had enough to be able to receive, but they couldn't send.

Still they hunted, and when they weren't digging into the far corners of the hold they sat around the table, taking turns at the crank while they listened to stations from all parts of the world.

Saturday evening was looked forward to eagerly. A big Atlantic seaboard station always broadcasted a résumé of the week's news, at that time. While they were waiting for it, they listened to a musical program coming from DJD, Germany's powerful *Deutschlandsender*.

It was Burke's turn on the rotor. Jackson, Fount and Gust were enjoying the Wagnerian program. Dr. Dreen was pawing through a casket of gems that had been brought up from the ice the day before. The flickering light glinted from the bright stones and glowed warmly yellow on the gold mountings. Dreen played with the stones as a miser plays with his money.

"Here she comes," said Jackson, dialing the music out. "Your turn, Dreen, if you can leave those baubles alone long enough."

He caught the shrill whistle of the oscillating tube signal used by the American station. He tuned it to its highest, clearest point, then set the dials there. In a moment the voice of the announcer came through clearly. The high points of world happenings were being sent out to all who cared to listen. The men hung on every word of what was going on, back in civilization.

Suddenly there came a piece of news that made every man catch his breath. Dreen, on the crank, made the tube glow red as they listened.

"Word has just been received from Point Barrow that a member of the Century of Progress Polar Expedition has been rescued," said the voice of the announcer.

"James Gowd, boatswain's mate, was found collapsed on the ice only a short distance from his goal, the northernmost point on the American continent. His face showed the ravages of hunger and exposure. He was taken to the Eskimo mission and was treated by the doctor in charge. Quick work brought back enough life for him to be able to mumble a few words, and they spelled another Arctic tragedy. According to Gowd, all members of the expedition were either lost with the crushing of the ship or died trying to reach land."

"The dirty, lying skunk!" Dreen bit the words out.

"Shut up!—Keep her spinning," snapped Jackson.

The voice from the air went on to mention the aims of the expedition members, and commented upon the high type of men which had gone to make it up. The entire world, it was said, would mourn the loss of these brave explorers.

DREEN let the tube die, when other news replaced the account of Gowd's return. No one seemed to care. No one wanted to listen to anything else.

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Fount dropped his head into his folded arms on the table. Alquist walked aimlessly to the end of the gallery and back. Dreen and Burke did not move a muscle.

Jackson, too, was crushed. His first message from the ship had slipped through without being picked up. Gowd's words had accounted for their silence. There would be no relief plane sent out to scout for them now.

He got up from his seat and stepped outside. He had to be alone for a few minutes; he had to think.

He stood on the deck of the old ship and gazed out over the wastes that lay white and dead in the light of a bright moon. Things were over now. Even with sleds made from the ship, they wouldn't be able to reach land. Nor would they dare attempt it; not with the days as short as they were now, and with all the men half sick. He had noticed that very evening that the knuckles of Fount's fingers were slightly swollen. In all probability they'd all be down with scurvy within ten days.

A figure stepped up beside him.

"Come on inside," said Gust. "It's too cold to stay out here, dressed as you are."

"So it is," said Jackson, rubbing his nose and ears. "I hadn't noticed it." He threw an arm over the quartermaster's shoulder. "Well, Gust, it was fine news that the shortest day in the year brought us."

Alquist nodded. "Fine news!—And the sun due back the middle of February. We'll never see it, though, Jackson."

They stepped inside. No one spoke for a long time; then, from a room off the gallery came the unmistakable sound of a shot.

Jackson looked quickly around. Burke was the only one gone.

"He went in just after you stepped outside," said Fount, aghast. "Never said a word. Just got up and went in."

Jackson opened the door. Burke lay on his berth, and his right hand was closed around the grip of a small side arm. There was a small trickle of blood in front of his right ear.

"And only the other night he said he was sticking," said the doctor. "He said, 'Don't worry, Jackson, I'm sticking.'—Remember?"

Jackson nodded.

"Yellow!" said Dreen. "Easiest way out!"

There was black anger in Jackson's eyes as he turned his back on the doctor and went to his quarters. Fount and Alquist went to theirs, too. Dreen slammed Burke's door shut and blew out the wardroom light.

IT was a gloomy week that followed. Then, on Saturday night, came the news. The station announcer told of the lost expedition survivor, in the hospital at Point Barrow. Gowd had lapsed off into unconsciousness, after telling about how he knew the rest to be dead. But in his mutterings, while out of his head, he had spilled the truth. It was now certain that others were out on the ice, and perhaps alive.

Shortly afterward, Gowd had died, and there was no chance to get the details.

The part that set four hearts to beating faster, out there on the Golden Ladie, was the report that the Army's new dirigible, the Ohio, would sail out over the Arctic on her maiden trip. Probably the following week. She would make an effort to locate the remainder of the party.

Even Gust became excited as the news flash ended. He quit turning the crank, and clapped Jackson on the back.

"Well," he grinned. "We beat her again, eh? Can't keep a monkey on deck in a full-rigged ship!"

They all had a drink of rum to celebrate—all except Fount. His eyes were too heavy, his gums too spongy.

They sat around and talked, but for once Dreen wasn't trying to monopolize the conversation. He appeared to be more thoughtful than he had ever been

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before. Jackson thought he could guess the reason; and sure enough, before he went to bed that night Dreen asked him again if he wouldn't order the other men not to start circulating that story about his having deserted and then being forced to return.

But the leader's answer was the same as before; they could tell whatever they wanted to. Dreen went to each of the others, in turn, but he got little satisfaction. Fount was sick and he didn't want to be bothered. He told the doctor just what he thought of him, and said it would be a damned shame if the world didn't find out what kind of a rat he was.

When Jackson went to get Dreen to try and do something for the oceanographer, he found him sitting in his cabin with his head in his hands. With a gesture, he cut off a renewal of Dreen's plea.

"See if you can't do something to ease Fount's pain.—Forget this other thing till the time comes."

And that night Fount died.

After they had buried him, Jackson took Alquist off alone.

"What do you make of that, Gust?" he asked. "I've never seen scurvy work that fast before. Have you?"

The quartermaster shook his head. "Never that fast! Looks funny as hell to me!"

"Me, too." Jackson dropped the subject, and they reëntered the wardroom. The doctor was drawing off a glass of rum. Jackson refused a drink, saying that he was going below to continue digging, that being as good exercise as any.

TWO days later was New Year's Eve, and Gust went to bed early, complaining of a headache and pains in his joints. His gums were a little swollen, too.

By Saturday, when Dreen and Jackson prepared to tune in on the short wave news broadcast, Alquist was very low. His breaths were coming in such shallow gasps, and his pulse was so high, that Jackson didn't tell him the latest report, that the dirigible had crashed.

"No need to worry him. And anyway, the announcer said that the ship would be quickly repaired," he explained to Dreen.

The next day was too late for Gust Alquist to care, however, and the doctor and Jackson buried him beside the others.

Things didn't set quite right on Jackson's chest, somehow. He did a lot of thinking, in the days that followed. He knew that Dreen had a strong enough motive. He would go to almost any extreme, to prevent the truth of his hooking up with Gowd from becoming known to the outside world. But would he go as far as to commit murder to attain that safety?

Somehow, as Jackson sat across the table from him during the long evenings, he decided that Dreen would go that far. But how would he accomplish his end? The chest of medicine was beneath Jackson's berth, and he could swear that it hadn't been moved. If the doctor had taken anything from it, he must have been planning far ahead.

At the first opportunity, Jackson entered Dreen's quarters and made a search. He found the small stoneware vial under the foot of the sleeping bag.

He faced the doctor with it.

"This came out of the chest the day you looked the contents over for an anti-scorbutic," he said. "What is it? Why did you take it, without saying anything at the time?"

Dreen laughed easily. "Witch's Brew," he said. "Good old-time cure-all. I took it for a tooth that bothers me occasionally. A drop in the cavity and the ache is gone."

"Sure it isn't poison?" Jackson's voice was brittle.

"Of course not! What're you driving at?"

"You know what I think about Fount and Alquist?—I think you killed them."

"You're crazy!"

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The doctor had a good many rums to his credit that day, and he was as cool as a cucumber.

"Maybe. But to prove that I'm not, will you put some of this in your own mouth? Will you drink a glass of rum, with a few drops of this stuff in it?"

Dreen merely snorted and walked away.

A heavy hand on his shoulder spun him around.

"Listen to me! I'm going to get to the bottom of this. Either you drink some of this or—or—I'll—"

"You'll what?" Dreen shoved his flabby face up close. "You'll what?"

"I'll know that you killed them."

The doctor threw his shoulders back and stuck the points of his fingers into his belt.

"Yeah?—Then what happens?"

JACKSON was so stunned by the coolness of the other's attitude that he didn't answer at once. Dreen continued:

"Don't forget what we were talking about the other night, Jackson!—About being able to reach the ship when she gets out here over the ice. We'll be able to reach her, even with our short aërial. And it'll take two of us to send out those signals. Don't forget that. Two of us."

"Now it's my turn to ask questions. What happens when she comes?"

"Why, then it's just your word against mine. That's all—just you and me. And all the gold and jewels will be split two ways — between you and me.—Nice to contemplate, isn't it?"

And in the talk that followed, Jackson saw for the first time the true blackness of the h art of the man with whom he was doomed to live, alone, until rescue came. He saw the truth of his words, too. No one man could rev that rotor up, through all those gears, and handle the key at the same time.

Yes, Dreen was right. It would take the two of them.

He stepped over to where Brandy lay whimpering with distemper. He took the old dog's head in his lap and held it till a convulsion brought the end. Then he closed the beast's eyes, gently, and stroked the rough coat.

Just him and Dreen left now. The last pal he could trust was gone to whatever heaven awaits man's most faithful friend.

Jackson went slowly to his room. Only himself and a murderer left!

CHAPTER VI.

SIGNALS.

TWO endless weeks passed without any word about the dirigible. Evidently the repairs were taking longer than had been at first anticipated. The delay had a depressing effect on the two who shared the good ship Golden Ladie under the trying conditions.

Neither feared that the other would kill, for one man alone would be doomed, unless luck brought the airship right to them. They went quietly about their daily task of keeping alive, with none but the necessary words.

When the third Saturday arrived, there was a report that the Army authorities were waiting for fair weather, in order to try the Ohio out again. The news brought a great change over the two marooned men. It broke the silence, and they talked.

But their talk was always on the same subject; what were the chances that the ship would reach them?

Then, without warning, both men began to show unmistakable symptoms of scurvy. Every morning they sized each other up to see what progress the disease had made. The knowledge of their poisoned blood wore at their nerves. There were near fights, but no blows were struck.

Each remembered that if one died the other would too.

One night Jackson was sketching with a pencil on a piece of old paper. For a

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long time Dreen watched him. Then, impatiently, asked what he was doing.

"I was just thinking about how one man might send a message out alone. I was drawing something that will take the place of a man."

The doctor leaned across the table. "Let's see it. What is it?"

"Only a windmill."

"A windmill?"

"Sure, don't you know what a windmill is? And there's plenty of stuff, with the armorer's forge and the carpenter's tools, to make one, too. A windmill will solve the whole thing, in case you die first. Too bad you wouldn't know how to make one, in case I kicked the bucket."

He looked up and grinned into the doctor's drawn face.

"A windmill wouldn't do it!" scoffed Dreen, but there was anxiety in his voice.

"Sure it would. I built one as a kid once, so that I wouldn't have to pump water for the stock on my dad's ranch. They can do a lot of work. And if you know how, it's easy to make one to turn the set."

Dreen was silent for a few minutes. Then he said:

"Maybe the dirigible will come close enough to see the ship here without signaling. Maybe one man would be saved anyway."

"And if the airship doesn't come close enough to spot this little boat among the pressure ridges? What then?—I'm satisfied we can send out for a couple of hundred miles, with the outfit we have."

"Why don't you make a windmill, then?"

"And let you kill me when it's done?" Jackson laughed. "Nothing doing! Time enough if you die first."

DREEN stretched his neck to see the design, but Jackson dropped his hand over it. A few minutes later the doctor started across the wardroom as though to get a drink of water from the bucket. Passing behind Jackson, he gave a quick movement and snatched up the paper. He jumped back, set himself for the expected attack. His blotchy face was screwed up into a hideous grimace.

"I've got it!" he shouted. "Don't come near me! — Don't try to take it away from me. I've got it, and I'll kill you if you try. Even if I don't kill you, Jackson, you'll be the first to die. The scurvy's got you worse than it has me. I saw your feet when you got up this morning. They're swollen.—And look at your hands. Your gums are red.—And all I've got is an itchy skin. You'll die first, and I'll use the windmill to turn the set."

Jackson didn't move. He had tried to keep Dreen from seeing what progress the awful disease had made in his body. There was a tightness about his voice when he spoke.

"Look at the paper," he said.

Dreen looked, and a curse ripped out. There was nothing there except a lot of interlocking circles and triangles; the sort of designs people make on scratch pads and the walls of telephone booths.

Dreen ranted insanely, and at last he stalked off to bed. Jackson continued to sit at the table. The doctor's remark, "Even if I don't kill you," kept rolling over in his mind, though it hadn't surprised him so much after all. For some time now, he had felt that Dreen was planning to be the only one rescued if the ship came. The remark only served to confirm his suspicions.

He went off to bed at last, wondering how the whole nightmare would finally end.

THE next morning the ice was working. Off in the distance was "water sky" that reflected an open lead. Jackson took his rifle and went over to see if he could bag a seal. The warm blood might serve to hold off the poison that was growing in his blood.

His puffed feet sent darts of pain

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through his body at each step, but he trudged on. He skirted the border of the wide water lane, but there was no sign of game. The trip back was one of extreme misery; but fortunately the days had now lengthened a little, and he arrived at the ship before darkness fell.

A hundred yards off the Golden Ladie's port bow was a great pile of boxes and casks. He swung off and investigated. It was the treasure. There were marks on the ice, where Dreen had dragged and rolled the heavy containers from the ship.

With a shake of his head, Jackson followed them up.

"Better save your strength for the radio crank," he said to Dreen.

The doctor laughed. "Don't worry about me," he replied. "But with the ice working like this, I'm taking no chances on a split where the ship lies here. I'm not going to see it crushed, and all that gold sent to the bottom."

"Well, she's stood it this long; she'll probably be here long after we're skeletons.—And if the dirigible doesn't come soon, that's just what they'll find."

He stepped into the wardroom and stopped short. Dreen had indeed been working. Kegs of powder had been carried up from below, and they were stacked at one end of the gallery.

Dreen's eyes twinkled cunningly. "I got a scheme of my own," he said. "It's better than your crazy windmill. I'll use the powder to signal, if you kick off. It's black powder. It'll make a hell of a smoke. All I'm doing is to make sure it's dry."

Jackson noticed that the lids were off all the kegs.

"Don't forget," he said. "If she's fifty miles away, and close enough down to scan the ice, she'll be below the horizon. She'll never even see the smoke."

Dreen's face twitched. "They'll see it all right," he wheezed. "They'll see it. I'll have to signal some way, if the radio doesn't reach them."

Jackson saw the desperation in the doctor's eyes. It was as plain as writing. Dreen knew that he would have to face murder charges, if they were both saved; and he'd be certain to see that he was alone when the rescue time came—if it ever did. His fear of consequences, and his greed for the wealth stacked up out there on the ice, would drive him to any length.

They took to their beds, and when they got up the next time, Jackson's hands were badly puffed. Dreen's face was somewhat more blotchy than before. They sat around and silently waited for Saturday.

WHEN it came, anticipation gave them new strength. Rank perspiration streamed from Dreen's face as he turned the crank and kept the receiving tube lit. Then the welcome news came. The Ohio had been tried out and found to be in perfect condition. She would fly to Fairbanks, Alaska, where fuel awaited her. From there she would make the short hop to Barrow and out over the ice. Great hopes were held out that some of the members of the ill-fated expedition might still be found alive, after all these unavoidable delays.

Dreen dropped wearily into the nearest chair. His wide shoulders sagged even more than usual. His eyes were sunken, but they were bright with excitement.

Jackson's legs were getting the bulk of the swelling, and they ached till he thought he would cry out in pain.

Their eyes met, searchingly. The time was coming for the showdown. Jackson knew that it was not over yet, for Dreen would never let him get aboard the dirigible, if he could help it. He would plan to do away with Jackson just as soon as the signals had been answered. All that talk about one's word again the other was bunk. Jackson knew he'd have to watch his step.

If he could have looked into the doctor's twisted mind he would have seen that his deductions were right. Dreen

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certainly intended to be alone when the airship arrived; and already his plans were well made.

Both were reasonably certain that they could hold out for the length of time it would take the rescue ship to come. And without a word about the good news, each returned to bed . . .

JACKSON clung to the edge of the table as he moved toward the radio. It took some of the weight from his black and swollen feet. His face recorded the torture of each step, and his breathing was wheezy.

Dr. Dreen watched him through eyes that were almost closed from sheer fatigue. Neither had slept for the past forty-eight hours. Their signals had gone unanswered. There had been no news of the dirigible; yet according to their reckoning she was long past due.

Dreen's face was haggard beyond description. Three scrofulous spots showed through his beard, where the whiskers had fallen out. There was a large bald place on the side of his head, too. His lips trembled.

"Hurry! Hurry!" he kept saying. "We can't rest a full half-hour. Ten minutes is enough."

Jackson nodded. "Give me a chance."

His trousers were split to above his knees, and the blackness of his legs showed. They were larger at the calves than at the thighs. The knuckles of his hands were puffed, and the skin was shiny from being stretched so tight.

He reached out with one foot and tried to bridge the gap between the table and the radio. But his bared leg refused to support the extra weight. He crumpled to his knees, but the groan that filled the wardroom came from Dreen's lips. He helped Jackson up, and got him onto a chair in front of the hand set.

Scurvy was deep within their feeble bodies. With Jackson, it had taken the more painful course of extreme swelling, but it was eating away at the doctor's very flesh. The advantage was Dreen's, for he still had the use of all his muscles.

"All right," wheezed Jackson, reaching for the key.

He watched the doctor grasp the big crank handle and bend his back to the task. The rotor spun, but not fast enough to generate the seven-and-one-half volts necessary to light the sending tube.

"The grease is too stiff and cold." Dreen's words were garbled as his tongue appeared in the gap where his teeth had fallen out.

"Put the lamp under the gear case."

The doctor climbed painfully to the table and lifted the light from the chain-supported ring. He set it close up under the part of the set that extended over the edge of the chair on which it sat. They waited for the heat to thin out the grease inside.

"We're done for!" whimpered Dreen, dropping his head into his hands. "Done for!—They didn't come. They don't care whether we die or not!"

"What do you mean, they don't care? Hell! They don't even know for sure that there is any one alive out here on the ice. Probably they think we're all dead—and they aren't far wrong at that."

"You said it wasn't too late yet. You told me that."

"Well, figure it out for yourself. You're a doctor. You know that if we can get cloudberries or any good anti-scorbutic, it'll fix us up right away. Fix us up like that . . ."

He started to snap his fingers, but the pain of the effort twisted his face.

DREEN grasped the crank again. It turned more easily. He was just working up speed when the loud speaker gave a slight squeal. The key was open to receive, and something was in the air, close by that wave length. Jackson manipulated the dials.

The squeal died out and in its place there came flat, mechanical speech. It

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was the Ohio. They were talking with the States!

"*BF64, Dirigible Ohio, cruising in neighborhood of 76-20, North—173 West.*"

The words came in a hollow monotone. Dreen and Jackson looked at each other. The doctor's lips pulled back over his toothless gums in what was supposed to be a smile.

Jackson tried to return it. They were lucky. They had caught the message at its very beginning.

The next words told them why their signals hadn't been heard. The Ohio's radio equipment had been out of order, and it was just now back in working shape again. They were informing the States that the run out from Barrow had been uneventful, except for the failure of their communication facilities. They had scoured the ice, during the light of two short days, and had ridden out the night between without experiencing any trouble. Further hunting was considered useless.

"The visibility is perfect, as the morning light now increases," said the voice. "If we sight nothing within the next hour, we will return to Fairbanks."

"They're going to leave us!" blubbered Dreen. "Quick! Quick! Send out our call.—Hurry!" he whined.

Dreen threw all of his strength into the crank.

"They're not far away, if my drift figures are correct."

Jackson looked up, and the expression he saw on Dreen's face stopped his fingers as they touched the key. He couldn't have described the look he saw there, but he knew what it was. The time for Dreen to kill him was but a few moments away.

The radio beacon indicator on the Ohio would give the course of their location. That would be enough for Dreen.

Jackson looked at his own hands, as he had looked at them many times in the past two days. He turned them over, and saw the rounded mounds that were his palms. It would be impossible for him to hold a gun. Yet he could see the outline of a pistol in the doctor's hip pocket, as the man bent to his task of keeping the sending tube lit.

JACKSON made his decision. One touch of the key might be enough. If the Ohio heard it and answered back, Dreen would kill him instantly. That much Jackson was certain of.

He drew his hand away, leaned back in his chair. The light in the tube flickered as the doctor saw what he was doing.

"Send, man!—Send!" he screamed. "Signal them! Are you crazy?"

"Not crazy, just smart," said Jackson. "It's death for me, either way. And I don't intend to leave you here alone, to be rescued."

Dreen's eyes flamed wildly. He let loose of the crank and raised his hands above the other's head.

"I'll *make* you send!" he shrieked.

"Try it!"

Jackson's voice was cold, calm. Calm with the nervelessness which comes to men who know that they are masters of their own wills.

His mind was made up. It wasn't just a final gesture; it was cold reasoning. He had to die anyway. Why not take Dreen with him? That wouldn't be murder. It would be justice. He had seen the killer light in Dreen's eyes, and he knew why the doctor had lately destroyed the crosses which marked the graves of those others, the men who had poison in their bodies. Jackson had watched the doctor scouting along the near-by pressure ridge, only two days before. Jackson felt sure that he could even pick out the ice slab under which his body would be hidden.

No, there was no question about the other's intentions. Jackson would be a fool to send out the signal which would save the murderer of Fount and Alquist, and by the same token sign his own death

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warrant. Dreen would have to go with him.

"Go on—try and make me send it!" he taunted. "You killed the others; you shouldn't be afraid to kill me."

"Yes, I killed the others. And I'm going to kill you, if you don't send out the signal. I'll use the powder to let them know where I am. You said they were close."

"Close is a pretty elastic word up here in the Arctic, Dreen. A hundred miles is close up here. They probably aren't any nearer than that. And they'd never see your smoke—never in a million years."

"Are you going to handle that key?"

The doctor's lips curled back and they were red from his bleeding gums.

Jackson shook his head. "I go—and you go with me."

He saw the fear in the other's face. He had seen the same look once before on the face of a man whom the law had sentenced to death.

Something tugged inside him. It was hard to kill a man—even one who so richly deserved it. He tried to give his reasons. It was not because he felt that he owed Dreen any explanation; but to try and salve that strange feeling within himself. To justify the decision in his own mind.

"I'm not playing at God when I doom you to die with me, Dreen. In law a jury of twelve men can sentence a man to death—twelve men who are probably less capable of measuring justice than I am. You are a confessed murderer—and I am that jury. The Supreme Judge of all may look down from above and decide that I am wrong. If He does, He will punish me in the hereafter; but it will be too late to save you. Your soul will rot in hell.—Or perhaps you have no soul. I know that you have no god."

DREEN'S lips were working. So were the fingers of his extended hands. His face was chalk-white, except for the splotches of decaying flesh. His eyes were those of one who hovers over the chasm of insanity. The hands moved slowly toward Jackson's neck; a finger touched his chin. And with a wild cry, Dreen threw his weight forward. They fell to the decking.

Jackson pushed with his swollen hands; kept the talon-like fingers from closing. They rolled. One of the doctor's feet knocked the lamp under the gear case over, and quickly he drew his leg back as sudden flames licked out.

From where they lay, Jackson could see the little river of spilled oil run across the curved decking and disappear under a barrel of tallow. Flames rapidly followed the streak. Dreen saw it, too.

Jackson felt the fingers closing down on his wind. He threw all he had into the hub which kept either hand from darting to the gun. A few inches above his own was the face of that terrible, fear-stricken demon. Jackson struck with the only weapon at his command—his skull.

Time and again he rammed his forehead into the hideous features. Blood flew from the bashed nose; it dripped into his own face, as he drew back each time; it filled his eyes; and it tasted like iron on his lips.

Finally he felt the grip on his throat loosen a bit. Then Dreen gave a heave. He was half to his feet, trying to break the hug that held his arms, when they fell back. Jackson saw the doctor's body catch the crank of the radio set; saw the heavy mechanism teeter on the edge of the big chair, then slowly topple over. It smashed Dreen's head against the floor.

Jackson's wind came back with a rasping gasp. He drew himself upright, and coughed from the thick smoke that filled the place. Through the wafting streamers he could see the flames licking at the grease on the side of the tallow cask. The powder was piled just beyond. For a second, Jackson didn't even feel the pain as his weight made his bare feet spread out like bags of putty.

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He grasped the doctor's legs, but his fingers wouldn't close around the ankles. He tried to fold his arms around the limp figure, but the soft flesh of his knuckles rubbed off on the decking. A big heave only pulled him down on top of the other man, and he couldn't budge the unconscious form.

THE tallow was burning briskly now. The powder would catch as soon as a stave burned through.

Once more he tried to move Dreen. The flames were roaring now.

He glanced quickly at the door of his own quarters. He could reach it without crawling through fire. On his hands and knees he scrambled toward it. When he came out he had his book of notes and the log of the Golden Ladie.

It was a handicap to crawl along with them, but he finally reached the outer door, tumbled down the steep companionway, and gained the deck rail. Then he rolled himself over and dropped into a snowdrift that broke his fall.

Horror was in his eyes as he glanced over his shoulder while crawling away. It couldn't be long till the explosion, now. He wiggled his way into the very cave that Dreen had already chosen as his tomb.

At that moment the whole Arctic seemed to give one huge, deep-throated cough. Débris rained down on the ice slab above his head.

When he came out he saw that the six feet of frozen ocean around the ship had been cracked by the great charge. Flames were leaping high, and a pillar of smoke climbed straight toward the heavens. In a short time the whole superstructure was ablaze, and Jackson basked in the welcome heat.

He looked at his watch. It was just eleven o'clock.

While the funeral pyre of the mad doctor burned, he sat with his head on his folded arms. At intervals he looked up and scanned the horizon with eyes that it was hard to keep open.

He started crawling about, so that he wouldn't fall asleep. There is no demand upon a man's will that is so hard to combat as that of sleep. He fought it by rubbing his eyes with pieces of ice; by keeping active, even when every movement was a torture that almost robbed him of his reason.

Once he stopped. It would be so pleasant merely to curl up and let the cold do the rest. It wouldn't take long, and there would be no pain. He could just doze off, and that would be the end . . .

SOMETHING just above the western horizon arrested his gaze. He told himself that it was a star shining there, but he knew it wasn't. He knew it was the Ohio, far enough above the horizon to be in the pale, slanting rays of the returning sun.

He crouched there on his hands and knees and watched the great aluminum cigar-shaped object grow in size. He shouted. He waved a hand that looked like an inflated rubber glove. He laughed. And he cried. The tears ran down and froze in his beard—like brilliants on a woman's gown.

All physical pain was gone now. His feet and hands didn't hurt any more. Maybe they were frozen. But what difference did it make? The only thing that mattered was that big ship in the sky. It was coming closer and closer. It was coming to get him.

He laughed hysterically as he crawled off to meet it. He was saved—saved! He had beaten the Arctic again. Beat it after all these terrible days of darkness. There she came, coming back with the sun—the same sun that had taken Fralic away. That was only a few months ago, as time is figured, but to Jackson it seemed like years.

The great ship hovered above him, settled closer to the ice. A rope ladder reeled out from her belly. Figures scrambled down to help him.

He couldn't talk when the first officer reached him; but he nodded his head

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when asked if he was the only one left. He pointed to the two books by the ice cave, and a man ran over to get them. Another was soon standing by the treasure, shouting madly and waving for the others to come.

Half consciously Jackson felt himself being lifted into a sling that had been made from the lower end of the ladder. In a few minutes he was in a clean bed, and a doctor was working on him. People were asking questions.

He shook his head until he felt that he could trust his voice, his brain, to frame words that would be sensible and not the happy blubberings of a kid going through the greatest experience of his life.

He couldn't let these people know how frightened he was; how afraid that now, with his body saved, his mind might break. For men didn't usually go through things such as he had gone through and come out normal.

The doctor reported that there wouldn't be even a finger lost, and Jackson smiled. The glass of medicine, followed by a drink of raw liquor, brought back a glow of warmth—and with it his self confidence.

He told them briefly of the finding of the ship, and insisted that they look at the log so that they wouldn't think him crazy.

"The fire was not a signal," he said. "It was just an accident."

Why tell this dirigible commander, or any one else, what had really happened? What difference did it all make? None! The others had died, that was all. Dreen had paid his price—had brought about his own death in his attempt to kill. Let it go at that. It would be hard to convince others, anyway.

"A fortunate accident," said the commander. "We were just about to head back when we saw the smoke."

He was gone for a moment, and then he came back to say that everything had been hoisted aboard. The officers left, and the hum of the great motors came faintly to Jackson's ears. The doctor left the small compartment.

Painfully Jackson turned upon his side, and he saw a tall chap with a bronzed face standing by the narrow doorway. The man moved in, pulled out a light stool, and sat down. There was a suggestion of nervous energy about his every action. He looked like a man who needed lots of elbow room.

WHEN he introduced himself he said, "I'm to stay beside you in case you need anything. Looks like you've had a tough go of it, Jackson. I suppose this is your last trip up here?"

Jackson liked the man's voice. It was curt and crisp, and the words were unminced.

The rescued man was thoughtfully silent for a moment.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I guess it's my last. The game isn't worth the candle."

"Perhaps not," said the man. "But still it goes on."

"Yes," Jackson nodded. "There are always fools to try."

The man smiled, openly, frankly.

"And I'm one of them, Jackson," he continued. "That's how I happen to be along on this trip. Just sizing up what's ahead of me. I'm taking out an expedition next spring—if I can raise enough money to equip my boat."

"An Arctic expedition?"

The man nodded. "I've got over half the money, but scientific bodies are hard to get money out of nowadays. I don't want to start till I have the finest equipment that money can buy."

Jackson's eyes sought his face, clung there.

"And I want to get together a group of men who have something inside them—men who can be depended upon."

He hesitated, momentarily. Jackson's eyes lighted. And in that moment of silence that followed all the lure of the northland waste, all man's desire of conquest, came back into the heart of Har-

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vey Jackson—into a heart that was half dead from pumping scurvy-laden blood—into a heart that was unlicked!

"There's plenty of money in that treasure from the Golden Ladie," he said. "I'll put it up—all you need."

The man started to speak, but Jackson interrupted him.

"When did you say you were planning to start?"

"Next spring."

"Next spring," repeated Jackson.

There was a prolonged silence. Jackson looked at his hands.

"I'll be well by then," he said at last. "I'll go with you. The Arctic *can* be beaten, and I know it."

Unwilled, and almost in the middle of a word, his eyes suddenly closed in sleep. A contented smile played over his face. For Harvey Jackson was of the stuff of which great explorers are made.

THE END

Tricks of the Trade

EVERY trade has its tricks, and the ammunition industry is no exception. But the "tricks" of this trade, according to some of the old timers, are gradually being discarded as the buyers become smarter and better educated. Not so many years ago a favorite trick of ammunition salesmen was to demonstrate how much stronger the priming in the shotgun cartridges made by their company was than the priming of their competitors' shells.

The salesman would take his own shotgun to give the demonstration, and then to show that he was not using a special gun, he would ask for some local man to bring him his shotgun. When the gun was brought, he would cut open the end of a shotgun shell of some make other than the one he was selling, remove the shot and powder, and insert the shell in the shotgun, ready to be fired. Then he would place the butt of the gun on the floor, holding the barrel perpendicular to the floor. A nickel or quarter would be placed over the muzzle of the gun, and with the gun still held perpendicular to the floor, he would have some one to pull the trigger. With a puff of smoke and a loud noise, the coin would be flipped weakly from the barrel and up into the air about two or three feet before it fell to the floor.

Following the same procedure, but using one of his own shells, he would have some one to pull the trigger of the gun, and the coin would be hurled to the ceiling, striking with a resounding slap, followed by exclamations of surprise and wonderment.

The explanation lay in a simple scientific principle and not in any superior power of shell priming. In demonstrating the "weakness" of a competitor's shell the salesman would place the coin over the muzzle of the shotgun so that the coin covered all of the opening of the barrel except a tiny bit. The little crevice left would allow the air column in the barrel of the shotgun to partially escape beside the coin. In demonstrating the brand of cartridges that he sold, the salesman would be sure to place the coin so that it covered the muzzle of the gun completely, with the result that the entire force of the explosion of the priming would be transmitted to the coin.

Kyle C. Moore.

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Novelette—Complete

"More than one smart fellow has she ruined!"

The Spy with the Bald Head

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "Article 246," "Murder on Gibraltar," etc.

A Legion martinet, a lady with a past, and a love-struck young lieutenant play strange parts in a North African intrigue

CHAPTER I.

THE MARTINET.

OLD Thibaut Corday, veteran of the Foreign Legion and a dozen wars, rested back in his chair and stirred his cinnamon beard with a sigh. Along the concrete curve of Boulevard Sadi Carnot the electric lamps were lighting; and couples walked arm in arm through the liquid blue of the dusk. Spring in North Africa. Even the Algerian *garçon,* fetching coffee and cognac to our table on the sidewalk, was less sullen than usual; and I saw him flash a glance at the dark-eyed little maiden behind the cashier's desk. Old Thibaut Corday saw it, too. Then the old soldier grinned at a black and brown cat that marched under the chairs with its tail in the air.

"The world," he chuckled at the young British consulate attaché and

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me," goes on. This June we will witness the same batches of marriage certificates, the same batches of kittens as last year. The same as a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand years ago. We have hurricanes. We have depressions. We have war. We have hate. *Oui,* but those are temporary derangements. It is love that is permanent. Love that is greater than them all."

"Really, old man." The young British agent was inclined to cynicism. "You mean to say love is greater than ambition? Love is greater than hate? Love is greater than war?"

Old Thibaut Corday lifted his glass and smiled into the saucer. "I mean real love, *mon ami.* Yes, I believe it is greatest of all. See how the *garçon* smiles at the little cashier. He knows her husband would fire him in a minute. *Oui,* he may lose his job, risk his very neck, but if the emotion is real enough he will continue to smile in spite of hell and damnation."

"You sound like a valentine," the Englishman prodded. "Love is all right for kids and rich men. But the fellow who is old and bald-headed—"

"Bald-headed!" The echo burst from old Thibaut Corday's beard like a shot; and he jumped as if the bullet had sailed by his ear. "Bald-headed!" He glared at the Britisher. "What made you think of that in connection with war and love?"

"I was just saying—"

"Sacred stove! It is queer you should have mentioned it. For this business of love and war and hate and bald heads puts me in mind of the strangest story in the world. A valentine, eh? I can tell you a love story that is not a valentine, but will have you weeping in fear and admiration and terror and surprise, the way I wept when I saw it. *Mon Dieu!* it is a terrible story."

The light of memory, kindling in the old man's blue eyes, made them brighter than the lamps on the boulevard. He glared at the Englishman and me, told us to wait a minute, and scurried around to his hotel on the other side of the square. When he was back at the table he had a photograph in his hands. Smiling strangely, he handed the picture to the British agent and me.

It was a dim snapshot, evidently a flashlight photograph taken at night, not very clear; but clear enough to make us wonder. The background was smoky, but the picture was that of a figure, an officer crouching in a cape. The officer wore cavalry boots and clutched an automatic pistol in a gloved hand.

The face was white, startled; the eyes squeezed shut; the features shadowed out of focus and wearing the foolish expression so common to those caught in facing a flashlight camera. Against the dark background, however, one feature stood out in stark distinction. The officer wore no hat; and the head was bald and shiny as an egg.

The ancient Legionnaire tapped the picture with a finger cocked like a trigger.

"There," he said grimly, "is the Man with the Bald Head. Did I ever tell you about the Man with the Bald Head?"

"Tell it," we urged.

He snorted dramatically. "I said it was a terrible story, *oui!* A war story grim as a firing squad. A love story tremendous as fate. A mystery story that makes the disappearance of

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Madam Steinheil's assassins or the Marie Céleste or the papers in the Dreyfus case look, in contrast, like the tricks of a cheap magician. The workings of this Man with the Bald Head almost drove the Secret Police of France, the Sûreté Générale, howling mad.

"Where did the spy come from? How did he ferret the most guarded secrets of the Foreign Legion? How did he vanish like a puff of smoke in front of the eyes? Who was he and what happened to him in the end?"

Old Thibaut Corday clawed his cinnamon beard, and leaned across the table.

"I am the only man who knows the answers, my friends, and I have never told them before. The war is now over fifteen years, and it does not matter. But I did not solve the incredible case. *Non!* Only one thing on earth could have solved it. The thing that is stronger than ambition and war and hate. Listen—"

The old Frenchman cleared his throat with straight cognac, and began:

THE Second Regiment, Foreign Legion, was in Morocco when the war broke loose; stuck in an evil little Arab seaport that had died of loneliness and too high a temperature a million years before. The Legionnaires ran a temperature, too, when they learned they were to be garrisoned in the antique fort behind the town, and there they would stay until France saw how the North African cat was going to jump.

And there we stayed. It was the devil of a hole, especially when we thought of all the activity in Europe. Save for a ship that would sneak in and out of port every once and a while, the coast was too dead to care. The garrison monotony was something incredible. Daytime it was drill. Evenings the men could sit around the barracks and pare their toe nails, or stroll up to the ruins of the old Moorish castle on the cliff and stare off across the sea toward France and fancy they heard cannonfire, or sit around Zadiq ben Zadiq's wine cellar in the lowest corner of town and watch Finette dance.

Our toe nails, of course, were soon worn to the quick by desperation. As for the Moorish castle, it was gloomy, an uphill trudge of a mile on barren landscape to see a place that made you think of torture chambers and secret tunnels and the bones of Barbary pirates. And the echo, naturally, was not cannonfire, but the boom of surf and tide charging into caverns deep under the cliff. The men soon tired of such hopeless sightseeing; and that left the wine cellar and Finette.

You have heard of Mistinguette, who sings at the Moulin Rouge in Paris? The lady with the million dollar legs who is rumored to be sixty yet looks as young as a chicken? Finette had a similar reputation. She was not sixty, I imagine, but she must have been forty. She had danced across Africa a score of times; the oldest veterans remembered her.

But she was young, you comprehend. As young as a kiss and a throaty song, a sinuous curve of the body, a kick from a silken leg. As young as a wink over the shoulder and a veiled look from pointed, jade eyes. Maybe she was not forty. Maybe she was thirty. Then you saw her dancing, and thirty was too old, and you decided she was twenty. And then you remembered with a shock that twenty years ago you had seen her dancing in Oran or Tizi-

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Ozou or away over in Sfax or back in Algiers. *Pardieu!* she had been a household word in the Legion for years.

"I am one pepper mill if she does not look sweet sixteen," a Legion dog would stare, pointing at the ivory figure so daringly exposed by the ostrich plume and sheer veil of her costume.

"And never been kissed," a corporal would sneer.

"How does she do it?" another would marvel at the twinkling ankles and high-heeled Parisian shoes stamping out something Spanish.

"How, indeed?" another would wonder, watching lights play wine-color in the mahogany and stormy mass of her hair.

"Ho, Grandma," some one would shout, grabbing at a powdered shoulder as she spun by his table. "My, what big eyes you have, Grandma!"

SHE had eyes, *oui!* The better to eat him with, as the story book would say. She would twist from the Legionnaire's grab and stab him with a look of scorn, a glare of green venom that made one think of daggers and poisons and claws. "Hands off, you gallows bird! Or perhaps Finette is old enough to remember why you sneaked into the Legion and changed your name."

She could curse the wise ones oath for oath; and those jade eyes could put a dog in his place. She knew the officers and men in the Legion, you comprehend—it was rumored she knew some of them only too well. There had been suicides over Finette.

"That vixen would break your heart," the veterans would advise an ogling recruit, "like she would snap a bun in her hand. More than one smart fellow has she ruined. They say she was once the mistress of—"

Which all goes to prove she was not ugly. Nor clumsy, for that matter. She could weave a can-can, a rumba, a dance of the seven veils, a shimmy of the Ouled Nail in a way to make those scarred and skeptical Legion dogs take notice. And after she had sung "Grinelle" or "Madelon" or "The Casquette of Pere Bugeaud" in that wounded voice of hers, the men would battle like rats to follow her down the street.

"Not to-night," she would scorn, slapping a few faces. "Come to-morrow, and try again."

I do not know which tortured the Legionnaires most—the standing guard in that rat-bitten Moroccan port, or the inviting refusals of that beautiful and timeless dancing woman. At any rate, she packed them into Zadiq ben Zadiq's like confetti—Arabs squashed against beach combers, soldiers mashed cheek to jowl with Negro Tirailleurs—and there were only two men in the whole garrison who failed to answer her siren call.

The first was Colonel Gustave Roelant, the stiff-necked commandant of the garrison, who would not have gone to see his dying grandmother dance. The colonel was a Huguenot, and the only two words in his vocabulary were discipline and duels. As for discipline, his spine was a ramrod, his eyes were made of nails, his mustache was steel shavings, his voice was a hammer and every word a spike. The regiment called him Iron Mask. As for duels, he was the finest pistol shot in the Legion, and, since expert marksmen are those most easy to insult, his record at avenging insults was deadly and appalling.

As for Finette, he hated her.

"Women like that," he would snarl, "are the curse of the army. Sing all

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that mush and break the morale of honest men—"

THE day our outfit paraded into that waterside Moroccan hole, Finette was to be discovered standing at the city gate, hands on hips, eyes green with amusement. "Ho, ho," she had cried as the colonel rode by. "If it is not old Iron Mask, the Pied Piper, leading his gang of rats. I hear there is a war. Before you die come and see me some time."

You can imagine our stern commandant halting the march to give her on the curb a lecture; and you can imagine the woman tossing that wine-hued head of hers and dealing the colonel what Americans call the Bronx applause. Colonel Roelant was red as a furnace when he lined us into the garrison.

"Never let me hear that viper's name in my presence," he thundered, "and if she ever comes within a kilometer of this fort put her under arrest!"

Perhaps that is why young Lieutenant Roelant, the colonel's nephew, never heard of her until—*alors,* that is ahead of the story. Now you can picture what it would be like to be the nephew of a man like Iron Mask, and an officer on his staff, besides. Who can be as stern, as grim and domineering as a relative who has paid a boy's way through school? If you think the good colonel was not going to run his nephew's life in Africa, you are wrong. The youngster joined our outfit the week after we settled in the garrison. I was appointed his aide; and was it my fault my ear was to the door the day young Gilbert Roelant reported to Uncle Iron Mask?

"Now understand this, young man. It was I who put you through St. Cyr, and had you placed in my regiment. If you expect favors because I am your uncle you shall soon discover differently. I shall expect you to make an officer worthy of the family name. You are going to have to earn the Roelant inheritance. I want you in your quarters studying. Every night! You will learn to command as I command. I warn you, let me hear nothing of you to incur my displeasure!"

That was a nice welcome from a dear old uncle, was it not? Myself, I felt a trifle sorry for this nephew. He was the youngest officer in the garrison, and he had a quiet reserve about him, something that reminded you more of the artist or musician for all his uniform and close-cropped military haircut.

Conscientious as a monk, he locked himself in with his lesson books and rule books every night. He shut himself into his room, and nobody saw him till morning. I remember thinking that if the garrison was monotonous for the rest of us, it must be like a prison for that red-cheeked lad.

Alors, the dead Moroccan days dragged along, and one day there was something a little different in the air. I did not know what it was, at first, and then remembered it was spring. *Oui!* there was that smell in the air, and the Legionnaires began to sniff and grow more restless than ever. That a powder mill had started to burn, that it might be an odor of dynamite in the wind, that the Man with the Bald Head had started his amazing business was not guessed by anybody until that night when Colonel Roelant called his staff to headquarters double quick. I will not forget that night, *c'est ca.*

Outside, the velvet dark, the nine o'clock stars like Aladdin lamps in the

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sky, the whisper of April letting her little winds kiss the palms, a strange, new perfume in the night. And a strange, new perfume in the commandant's office, I can tell you. Fire and brimstone. Hopping rage. The colonel's white thatch stiff with emotion, eyes blazing like pine knots.

"Codes, documents, papers have been stolen from this office. In the last six months as many transports, secretly leaving this port, have been caught by German submarines and sunk." The colonel was squalling, waving a photograph in his hand. "There is a spy among us. Dead or alive we have got to capture this bald-headed man!"

CHAPTER II.

THE SEARCH.

A SPY! Did you ever hear of the *espionnite?* That is a word peculiar to the French language, and it means "spy fever." And nobody on earth can catch spy fever as badly as a Frenchman. It is a queer disease, is it not? We curse the enemy spy for a cowardly fiend, and forget that our own agents are stealing the plans in Berlin.

Eh bien, the colonel was having a case of the fever so violently he bubbled at the corners of his iron mouth. "I am going to find this traitor, this *salopard* of a Boche agent, if it is the last thing I live to do!" Iron Mask screamed and tramped up and down the floor; then he turned and faced his staff, lowering his voice to the sound of a saw on an iron pipe.

"Now listen to me, my braves. For the last six months this sneaking spy has been at work in this garrison. Advices have been leaking through to the Germans. Ciphers have been taken, and wireless codes rifled. When the dirty business started I sent for the secret police. The Sûreté has been watching the garrison, and can find nothing. Nothing! Its hands are empty, and the spy works on. But one thing we know. The spy is known to the Germans as H-13, and he works out of this fort."

A bated silence fell over the headquarters office; a hush broken only by the colonel's fierce inhalations for breath and the squeak of necks strapped in collars as the staff turned to glare at one another.

"By to-morrow," Iron Mask gritted, "I want that H-13 blindfolded against a wall."

The staff nodded dumbly.

"I have caught the man," the colonel whispered on. "Here he is!" He held up the photograph. "This picture was taken to-night. A flashlight camera hidden in my private safe, the fuse attached to the door. The Sûreté men expected an attempt would be made on the safe, and planted the device weeks ago, wishing to photograph the spy on the job.

"The very day the secret service is called away, the spy makes the attempt. The cursed *salopard* must have opened the safe while the garrison was at mess. Thinking the flashlight explosion was a warning bomb, the fellow fled and got away. But he cannot have gotten far." The commandant's tongue lifted to a savage shout. "Do you fools understand me? This photograph was taken right here in this room not an hour ago. I want this man!"

He jabbed the picture at his officers. You understand, it was the snapshot of the officer with the bald head. Young Gilbert Roelant was the first one to look at the picture, and he held it in fingers that shook with excitement.

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"Why," he blurted, "the man wears cavalry boots and the cape of a Legion officer from which the tabs have been cut—"

"He seems to have lost his cap," an adjutant growled.

"That is a regulation service automatic," a captain pointed.

"*Oui!*" the colonel bellowed. "But who is the man? Do any of you blunderers recognize that face? Look at that head! The scoundrel dropped a *képi* in that corner of the room and shows that head as bald as an egg. Some one of you must have seen a man with a bald head—"

BUT there, in the rising crescendo of dismay and excitement, was the point. The garrison staff glared at the photo in thickening consternation. The face was out of focus and might have been anybody. But that hairless noggin was definite as an electric bulb.

"I do not remember one who is bald," the adjutant said in a shaky voice.

"Nor I." "Nor I." One after another the staff officers shook their own brushy heads. Each officer in turn could rack his brain and not recall such an officer or Legionnaire in our little encampment. Myself, I had been in the Legion longer than most, and the only one I could recall to match that eggish dome was a brigadier down in Marakeesh, and his head had ended on a tribesman's spear, mournfully detached from the body.

Colonel Roelant actually began to boil. The sweat simmered out of his forehead in streams. He had caught the spy, true enough, and at the same time he had not caught him at all.

"The cur could not have escaped the garrison. Every wall is guarded. And he cannot get away with *that* head. Call assembly. Name of a Name! but I will examine every scalp in the post. Turn out the men!"

It was ten o'clock, I recall, and by the quarter hour every jackrabbit of the outfit was lined up panting on parade. Bugles blew and corporals puffed on whistles and a battery of searchlights flooded the drill field bright as noon. "Hats off!" was the order. If a madder command was ever given in the French Foreign Legion I would like to hear it.

Can you picture those Legion dogs summoned to assembly, lined up, counted off, all thinking they were starting for France, then hearing an order to doff their *képis?* Then you can fancy those numbskulled rows of Legionnaires yawking in amazement. At that time of night! Cootie inspection! Well, by the blood of St. Francis of the Birds! And then the astonishment to find out it was not a business of jiggers. Not with Colonel Roelant, steaming with fury, and his perspiring staff rushing from man to man and yanking, fingering and cuffing those only too healthy scalps. Those heads were pulled, you comprehend. No gentle massage. A lusty tug that would have betrayed the first spurious strand. Then there was madness in that velvet spring night, I can tell you that. Holy St. Jean! there was not a bald head—not even a thinning one—in the entire regiment.

Colonel Roelant yelled like a kicked tiger. "Search the garrison. Go through the barracks. Find the Man with the Bald Head. Hunt!"

Find the Man with the Bald Head! The Legionnaires took up the cry, and the contagion blew from lip to lip. In half a minute the Second Regiment was down with spy fever to a man.

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The fort was turned upside down and wrung inside out. The shouting Legionnaires went through the barracks like bloodhounds. Lights flared on walls. Squads rushed from gate to gate like ghosts in the dust, whistles shrilled, non-coms cursed, a signal officer dashed from somewhere with handfuls of flashlight photographs of Baldy to distribute among the men; one would have expected such a commotion to conjure from the shadows a thousand hairless spies.

But the magic was all on Baldy's side that night. The garrison was gone over with a fine tooth comb, and our Man with the Bald Head was not combed from the tangle.

COLONEL ROELANT was ready for a straitjacket. "The fiend must have gotten by the guards, escaped into town. No living being has been allowed in or out of that town for the past week. The spy is hiding there, I tell you. Examine every Arab to the last guttersnipe. A thousand francs! A thousand francs of my own money to the one who finds the Man with the Bald Head!"

A thousand francs reward! Bones of Boniface! that was a fortune to those penny-a-day Legion dogs. "The one thing in the world to make this seven kinds of a search," Christianity Jensen, my *copaine,* gulped at me as our squad spilled from the fort and tore townward. The little Dane swung a wild lantern to show his wilder face. "For a thousand francs I would betray my own bald brother. I am glad I never lost any of *my* hair—"

I can tell you one thing—mine almost fell out from astonishment that night. If the Man with the Bald Head was not in the fort he must certainly be in the town. It was war time, remember, and the walls of that seaside ghetto were patrolled like the walls of the Bastille, while the gates were guarded like the Heavenly Doors.

The Legion squads spread across the town with all the enthusiasm of wolf gangs, racing down alleys and byways, thundering into Arab hovels and pulling terrified Moslems out of their beds by the hair. Do you think hats and turbans were respected articles of wearing apparel that night? Do you think scalps were sacred? Ha! Turbans went flying like unrolled bandages down the streets. Negro Tirailleurs saw their red tarbooshes go kiting. Fezzes, dirty sun helmets, topees and Hebrew nightcaps came sailing out of windows in a veritable blizzard of hats. The howls of Arabs getting their pompadours pulled soared up to the April stars like the dirge of a massacre.

"But look at these Arab curs," Jensen puffed at me as we stamped into a native house like the soldiers of Herod and dragged the male occupants from their holes. "Manes like lions! One would think a salesman of hair oil had just canvassed this *cul-de-sac.* Where can this infernal Humpty Dumpty have hidden himself?"

He was not hiding up our alley *c'est ca.* From the cries of frustration rising from other quarters of the ghetto, he was not hiding there, either. By midnight the whole water front population had been kicked awake, had its head yanked and its record studied, and to no avail. Hair was at a premium that night, and every Arab, beach comber and beggar caught in the Legion dragnet seemed to have more of it than a Russian pianist.

It was the Dane who had the bright idea. "How about Zadiq ben Zadiq's?"

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he panted at the squad corporal and me as we galloped through the bazaar. "Listen! How about asking Finette! She knows every man in town—"

"Very fine, *mon drôle!*" the corporal agreed. "Sooner or later every man in the port goes to see the dance. Perhaps it has not yet been searched. That is a place!"

That was the place, all right. We charged down a narrow alley filled with goats, and burst through the doorway of Zadiq ben Zadiq's wine cellar. I was the first one through, with Jensen on one side and the corporal on the other. We saw at a glance that the place had already been searched, for the crowd at the tables was uncovered to a man, and in that beach comber collection of souls the Man with the Bald Head was not to be seen.

Something else was to be seen, though, I give you my word. When my companions and I saw it we stood like gawks, bug-eyed. Turn me into a cabbage if we did not stare. I heard the corporal's Lebel butt hit the doorstep with a thump; and Christianity Jensen's whisper came out of his neck like a choke.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he nudged me. "Look at *that!*"

CHAPTER III.

THE CHALLENGE.

THAT was Finette dancing. I told you how the woman could move a thigh and hold an audience on the palm of her hand. But I cannot tell you how she was dancing when we burst into Zadiq ben Zadiq's to look for the Man with the Bald Head. Dancing as she had never danced before, I promise you that. Dancing as no woman in the world had ever danced before. Not the can-can or the shimmy or the dance of the seven veils. *Non!* Something different. Something that held that huggermugger audience paralyzed.

It was not a dance, when I come to think of it. She moved and swayed on the smoky platform, she stretched out her white arms and pirouetted in her gauzy veils, and there was something different about the thing. The whole room knew it was different. Now you can laugh as I tell it, but it was as if that stinking wine cellar had become a church. Those customers watched her with the open-mouthed wonder of men watching a miracle in a shrine.

Miracle? Well, the woman had thrown aside her earrings, bangles, high-heeled Parisienne shoes and ostrich plume. She danced in a sheer white shift, a snowy veil that made of her stormy hair, by contrast, a dark and wonderful torch-flame. You know how wine-colored hair can glow? And her eyes glowed, too. And that was not all.

She was singing as she danced. I do not know the song she sang that night, but I know it was not "Madelon," "Grinelle," or "The Casquette of Pere Bugeaud." She was singing a song of old France, a love song of springtime; and her voice was as strange as if it was the voice of another woman. *Mere de Dieu!* it almost frightened me. Not the song, you realize, but the voice behind it—the voice of a soul. It was as if that Finette had suddenly found a soul and was putting it into her dance and song, and holding it out to somebody.

Then I saw who it was, and you could have turned me into a pepper mill. She was singing this amazing song to a young officer who sat direct-

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ly in front of her platform in the image of a trance. I had to gurgle when I saw him there. Drinking, he was. The nephew of Colonel Roelant—young Lieutenant Gilbert Roelant — sitting entranced before the platform and drinking in the woman's song like a man drinks a new and wonderful wine.

He did not see the Legionnaires in the doorway. He was too intoxicated with that song. His cheeks were bright, his chin slept in his palm, his eyes were candles in his boyish face—candles burning for Finette. She did not see us, either. There was a crowd in that hole and all hell blowing outside; but those two were alone, if you understand me. Alone!

That was why the three of us in the doorway stood with our jaws flapping. Then the dance stopped, and we had a chance to gape some more. Young Roelant was on his feet, cheering.

"Bravo! Sing another! Encore, encore!"

"But I have been singing for you the better part of an hour." Finette was looking down at him, hands clasped, lips parted, eyes smiling the sort of smile one does not frequently see in dance dens. And she had been singing for him the better part of an hour! I looked at Christianity Jensen, and he looked at the corporal, and the corporal looked at me. I wondered if the spy fever had gone to our heads, if this was a common delusion. But there was the nephew of Iron Mask Roelant, slim in the tunic of the Legion officer, apple-cheeked, bright-eyed, bowing. Bowing, I tell you, with one hand over his heart.

"Please! Again the one by Villon. The little *chanson* you sang at the first. Please, *mademoiselle*—"

"*Mademoiselle!*" The echo gunned from the night outside, thunderclapped past me in a roar that almost bowled me off my boots; and brought Colonel Roelant bounding down the steps into the room, cape aswirl, heels crashing, eyes fierce as fangs, an iron bomb bursting into the scene.

"What the forty devils are you doing, Lieutenant Roelant? What does this mean? I sent you here an hour ago because I wanted this rat's nest inspected by an officer I could trust. I sent you here to interrogate that woman. Why have you not reported? What do you mean by asking this wench to sing again—addressing her as *mademoiselle?*"

THE boy looked like a sleepwalker yanked out of a dream. I saw him clap on his cap and click into the salute. "Sorry, and if *monsieur* the colonel—"

"Sorry?" Iron Mask panted. "You realize we have hunted this town from wall to wall and the spy is not found? I have waited for you—"

"If *monsieur* the colonel will pardon me, the lady is not a wench. You see, Colonel Roelant, I made the inspection. There is no bald-headed man here.

"The lady had been singing when I interrupted, and I only asked her to carry on. She was singing—"

"Lady?" the colonel screamed. "You beg my pardon to tell me that—that woman is not a wench? Then you talk of singing—"

The lieutenant's cheeks colored a deep flush. "*Mademoiselle* was singing very beautifully. I had not heard the song since I studied music as a child, and I—"

"Music? Studied as a child?" The post commander clawed at the hooks

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in his bulging tunic collar; rocked on his heels; towered tiptoe at his nephew. "Good heavenly saints, what manner of officer are *you?* There is a war on! We hunt a spy—a bald-headed spy. You chatter of music and call that hussy—" His voice cannoned on and on, dinning in the staled smoke. The boy stood unflinching before the barrage, and nobody in that crazed scene moved.

Myself, I was sick for the youngster, because I thought I could understand. It was his first commission in the service, and he had studied too hard, spent too many nights cooped up in his quarters with the door locked. That was how I reasoned it.

But Uncle Iron Mask was not the sort to realize spring was in the air; and there are no excuses in the Foreign Legion.

"So she is not a wench, eh? You, a pretty little cadet from St. Cyr, are venturing to tell me about this rotten dancing girl.

"You default on duty, and not only that, but you must—"

"Please!" Finette's voice trembled as she appealed to the shouting commandant. "The boy was merely listening—"

Iron Mask spun toward the platform, knocking aside a chair. "When did you start making excuses for Legion officers, fishwife? If you want to be arrested for interfering with a soldier in line of duty—"

"*Monsieur* the colonel is mistaken," young Roelant whispered. A bead of sweat, bright as mercury, struggled down the cord of his jaw. "I ask the commandant not to involve the lady. I waited, remained here because I hoped the spy might enter the wine cellar to escape the hunt. The lady did me the favor—"

"Once and for all, that harridan is not a lady!"

"But the boy is a gentleman, at least," Finette blazed out, giving the colonel a glare of scorn. "That youngster is the first man in the Legion I have ever known to have any manners—"

"Thunder of God! So the young whelp has manners, has he?"

"It is true," the woman whispered fiercely. "He came in here and ordered these men to—"

COLONEL ROELANT interrupted with a terrible snarl. "I might have known the young fool would fall in love with the first—"

"You are wrong, Colonel Roelant. I never saw the lad before."

"I see it now," Iron Mask twisted out. "The young whelp is in love! Ho, ho! In love with a—"

"If I was," the boy cut in evenly, "what business is that of the post commander?"

He spoke that out in the voice of a saber, and it wrenched a vein in his uncle's forehead. Purple? The colonel's face was black.

"I will tell you what business, you insubordinate *coquin!* I will show you what happens to officers who fail their duty and take up with camp followers like this courtesan—"

The boy's words rang like shots. "Uncle Gustave! I warn you, I demand of you to be careful in how you speak of the *mademoiselle!*"

I guess nobody had ever spoken to Colonel Roelant like that before, either. *Bon sang de sort!* but he looked mad. Perhaps the lot of us were a little mad that night. The dancing woman who called the boy a gentleman because he had done something or other. Young

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Roelant, standing like St. George before the dragon, head up, chin out, that bead of mercury on his jawbone matching the flash in his eye that was unafraid of the barrage thundering from his uncle's mouth. There was that room of Arab ragtag stunned by this drama it could not understand; and there was Finette like a statue on the platform; and there was old Roelant palsied to tottering by the storm on his tongue.

"You dare tell me to be careful of how I speak of that hag?"

"I will not listen to you insult this lady!"

"You will listen to your chains clank on the rock pile at Oudja, you insubordinate little ninny! That will teach you. *Oui,* I will have your sword and send you to the Bat d'Af for this piece of folly! Not a sou of my money will you ever see, and chew on that, too. As for this Finette, this crone of a thousand scandals, this doddering gutter-dancer—you call her a lady, eh? Look at her! Painted! Hag! Ha! Evil-tongued and blasphemous. Why, there is not an honest hair in that woman's head—"

"Liar!" And *smack!* The blow came with the word. The boy's white palm striking hard across the colonel's cheek.

"If *monsieur* the colonel is a gentleman," followed the whisper that all in the room could hear, "*monsieur* the colonel will be man enough to forget the regulations and meet me on the field at daybreak."

The sound in Colonel Roelant's teeth was the sound of a dagger slow-drawn from a rusty scabbard. "The colonel of a regiment does not fight duels with a third class private who takes issue over a hag. But in this case I will make an exception. My seconds will meet you in the field behind the old Moorish castle at sunrise to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

"READY! AIM!"

I SHALL not soon forget the way of that challenge between Colonel and Lieutenant Roelant. I shall not forget that dreadful and homicidal affair between uncle and nephew if I live to be a thousand and two. I shall always remember the colonel's cape whirling through the door; the clatter of hoofs that bore him away. I shall always remember how the boy left that wretched wine cellar and strolled across the town in the springtime dark, his face white as bone, but a smile in his eyes and his lips whistling that little *chanson* of Finette's.

And looking back from the doorway of Zadiq ben Zadiq's, I had a glance at Finette that I remember. I can see her now as I saw her then, her fingers frozen to the marble column of her throat, her eyes transfixed on the boy's retreating back. No longer was she young, *non!* in that hollow moment all her feminine magic had been betrayed. Age sagged her cheeks and the years wrote themselves across her temples. Winter was there. She looked a hundred.

We stumped back to the barracks in graveyard silence—the corporal, Jensen the Dane, and I. The demoted lieutenant's only word to us, seeing us at last in the door, had been to appoint us as his seconds. We understood what that meant. Our duty was to keep mum whatever the outcome, to escort the dueller to the field, and sometime before the fatal hour try to arrange reconciliation. And do you think Uncle Iron Mask with his slapped face

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and his soul burnt out with spy fever was one to be reconciled?

"*Fichtre!*" Jensen whispered. "It is a brave man who can challenge Iron Mask at pistols. The boy has spoken his own death sentence."

The corporal gagged, rolling his eyes at the locked door to the lad's room. "This is madness. The colonel will shoot him like a dog."

"That he should fight for the name of Finette!" the Dane groaned. "Somebody should have stopped him."

"Did you see his face?" the corporal panted. "Stop him? *Non!* Some one must go to headquarters and plead the case. You, Corday. You were the boy's aide. Go to Iron Mask. This will be no duel. It is murder."

I went to headquarters and came back with the colonel's answer, given by an orderly. The envelope was marked "confidential to Gilbert Roelant." It was a pass to permit the bearer and party to leave the garrison just before sunrise on a *mission extraordinaire;* made out to Legionnaire of the Third Class Roelant, and signed by Colonel Roelant, Post Commander. That was not a pass, either. For Gilbert Roelant that was a funeral certificate.

Have you ever witnessed the dawn in this North Africa; the dawn of April? The hush on the ancient world just warming out of sleep? The vapors pooling blue in the hollows where the flocks are rousing? The patent leather green of the palms, drinking moisture before the day's thirst sets in? Even in a backwash like that dirty Moroccan port, with darkness thinning on Arab walls and minarets and domes, it made one take new breath.

Wraiths in the dimness, we climbed the cliff trail in what might have promised a new and happier day if the circumstances had been not what they were. Behind us in town the roosters had started. From the garrison, still in darkness (I do not know what had happened to the other Legionnaires that night) droned the routine call of the sentries.

I stole a look at young Roelant, wrapped in his cape. A spot of shy coloring had come to his cheek; his eyes looked straight ahead; his jaw was carved square. In the youth of that morning, he looked younger than ever. I felt as empty as if the stomach were cut out of me. It was not a pleasant stroll. Instead of the spy, H-13, going blindfolded to the wall, our madman's night had caught a twenty-year-old youngster to go to something worse than a firing squad, and his eyes wide open. It was not pleasant, this escort to the grave.

The spot was well chosen for murder. That old tower on the headland; its roofs broken in; its walls half-crumbled by time; its windows like the eyes of a skull, the upper ones faintly lemon where the first tints of the eastern sky were leaking through. Wind moaned in the high turret, sighed in the archways; and under the seaward wall that leaned out over the cliff sounded the exploding of surf on the beach of rocks far below.

"The good colonel is on time," Jensen snarled in my ear. "He would not be the officer to be late for such an appointment."

The post commander and his party were gray ghosts gathered under a palm in the middle of the stony barren fronting the ruin. There were no words of greeting. But I had thoughts. What a mockery to have that red-whiskered garrison surgeon here. Iron Mask left them only for morticians. And from the clamp of his mouth this morning,

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he was planning to win again. He never glanced in our direction, but went on unhooking his tunic; then briskly rolling up his sleeves.

The surgeon gave us a near-sighted nod, and promptly opened a case of shiny instruments.

FROM then on I had to watch, as hypnotized by the illusion as a schoolboy watching his first melodrama from the stalls. Name of Father Anselm! the thing was actually happening. I was clutching the lad's cloak; beside me the Dane and the corporal waited boggle-eyed; there was the boy, stripped to the belt, stepping forward to pick his pistol from the brace extended by the colonel's orderly. Half choked by the words, the staff surgeon was reciting the instructions—the seconds were on their honor to keep silent; the contestants would take twenty paces, turn, face each other. The commands would be ready, aim, fire.

In the skull-eyed upper windows of the castle that was backdrop to the scene the sky was streaked as with blood. Wind, dust and a smell of spray soared up the cliff and swirled across the stony stage. I saw Gilbert Roelant turn his head, just once, toward that kindling horizon beyond the bluff.

Far out on the edge of daylight the Mediterranean was a blue curve coming into view. Over that curve lay France. Only an instant the boy's eyes rested there. A flicker of anguish that revealed the panic in his breast. Then he squared his shoulders, clamped his jaw and walked off to die for a dancing girl's honor. *Mon Dieu!* these people were not actors. This was a romantic boy; and there was an uncle who would never forgive a slap in the face, a crack-shot officer who would shoot to kill.

The lad was pacing the twenty steps. The colonel was marching—a grim, metal-eyed automaton run by clockwork—hip, hip, hip, click, about turn.

"Ready!"

Two figures at attention, like stones.

"Aim!"

Two pistols lifted arm's length, steady on the point.

"Stop!"

The scream breaking across the wind in desperate echoes, unexpected as a cry from midair. Old Iron Mask leaping about as if thrown by a snapped spring. The boy's dismayed shout. The surprised yells of the wooden soldier audience.

You know who came running up the path, came shadowy and racing across the field in a little flurry of cape-skirts and dust? Perhaps you have guessed. I knew who it was the minute I saw the tossing flame of her blowing, wine-colored hair and the grace (even in that climax of desperation) in her cloak-wrapped figure. Perhaps you have guessed it was Finette, *oui,* who came running like the wind, bare-headed, the oval of her face whiter than marble and eyes green as witch-fire as she threw herself at the colonel and dashed the pistol from his wooden hand. But you have not guessed the fierce words that blew from her lips and turned that raging uncle to an image.

"You cannot murder the boy! You cannot kill him like this! Call off the duel! Forgive the lieutenant! Spare him his commission and restore him to the regiment, and I— Listen! You hunt a spy, you seek a man in officer's cape with a bald head?" She was beating small fists at the colonel's shirt-front. "Forgive the boy and I will tell you where you can find this Man with the Bald Head!"

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"What?" Iron Mask screamed. "You know the spy—"

"And will take you to him on your promise to free the boy; will lead you to his hiding place; I know—I have seen—"

The colonel's roar wrenched the iron in his face. "Done! But let me tell you, if you lie—"

"Lie?" Finette's cry broke in a pealing, falsetto laugh; swirling in her cape she flung out a hand in the direction of the ruined tower. "Why, you old bloodhound, the man you seek hides in there! Why, look! I saw him now! Peeking from that upper window. There!" Crying the words over her shoulder, she sped past the shock-smitten lot of us, raced across the stones and vanished in the gloom-hung archway of the tower. "I *saw* him! The Man with the Bald Head—"

CHAPTER V.

THE ANSWER.

SOMEWHERE in the innards of that tower her feet were drumming on stone steps; and we stared like vegetables at the cobwebby hole where she had gone. Like vegetables, I say. A full moment, foolish as a row of carrots. Then a yell broke from the boy; pistol in fist, he was halfway to the arch before the rest of us had moved. He was stopped before he got there, though. Stopped in his tracks by a shot that exploded from one of those hole-in-the-skull windows of the tower. *Wham!*

It was not a good shot; not such a shot as old Colonel Roelant would have taken at the lad. The bullet hit dirt a yard ahead of him; sent harmless pebbles skittering. But a drift of smoke hung in that window where the gun had fired, and for a halved second a face was visible behind that whirling curtain.

The boy yelled when he saw that face. The colonel yelled. So did the rest of us. The scream joined hands and flew at the yellow-painted sky as if launched from a single throat.

"The Man with the Bald Head!"

I tell you, there it was, paused for a second in the window's stone frame, a ghost's face conjured in the smoke. In that high skull-eyed hole the features were melted in shadow, but there was the blue collar of the military Legion cape, and there, polished to a dome-like shine by daylight from above, stark as bone, was an egg-bald head. Presto! it was gone.

Soul of the Little Corporal! but we were not vegetables then. Bodies dusted by me and I was swept with them by the suction. First in the archway, young Roelant let out a cry. "Finette! Come back! He will kill you!"

"Quick!" Faint as an echo from yesterday the woman's voice came down the tower stairs. "Up here! He will get away!"

The echo ended on a scream. Aloft in the turret there was a shot. Then another. Then a fusillade. *Bam! Bam! Bam!* Gunfire boomed and banged like a miniature thunderstorm lodged in the roof; balls of sound bouncing and ricocheting down the upward passage. Our boots crashed on the moldering steps. Dazed and cursing, we mounted those ancient stones, took the winding stairway two at a time.

"Finette!" we cried. "Finette!" We cursed then, I promise you. No answer from above. The thunderclaps in the roof had stopped.

The boy was the first one to reach the door to that high stone balcony that hung in open sky and daylight at

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tower's top. When he got there he was stopped. So were the rest of us, rooted in the doorway behind him. No soldier of us moved. Neither did the woman posed with her back toward the gap broken in the stone railing; standing to face us with one hand fixed to her bosom, the other dangling an automatic at her side, her wide eyes smiling at the lad.

A feather of smoke detached itself from the drooping gun-barrel. I heard Iron Mask gargle an oath. I heard Finette sigh. I saw the sky behind her color to gold and wind come sweeping in from the horizon to shape her cape about her and bring to life the masses of her dark-flame hair, haloed by that sunrise.

CAN you see the woman, silhouetted against the Mediterranean's blue, the horizon's gold? Only the drum-sound of surf from far below, the sigh of warm spring wind? Smiling at the boy, like a girl? Winter the night before, *oui,* but springtime to-day? *Non,* you cannot see her, for I cannot tell it. All I can say is, it was enough to rob us of our tongues—those of us who could remember her dancing back in Algiers, back in El Kantara, years back in Tizi-Ouzou.

"Where is he?" Alone of us, the colonel could think of the business at hand. Even then he had to whisper. "Where is the Man with the Bald Head?"

Finette smiled softly. "I have killed him, that bald-headed one. That the fellow was a spy I did not know. Often I had trailed the bird to this ruin before." She lifted the hand, heavy with the gun, and brushed a strand of hair from her eyes with a white wrist. "But it was the only bald head I have seen around. I—" The limp hand dropped.

"Finette!" young Roelant cried out. "You're hurt—"

"There was a struggle with the gun," she told him, smiling. "Up here. That devil in the cape. I shot him." She nodded her head. "Cape and all. He is gone. Over the balcony—"

There was blood on the stone floor at her feet.

"I shot Bald Head," she whispered. "Bald Head shot me—" She swayed; let fall the palm from her bosom. Drops ran from her fingers. The palm was red.

"Finette!" The lad sprang, but, with the rest of us, was too late. She simply fell backwards into the sky, and was gone. On the brink of that high, stone bastion we hung panting. The clean sky was filled with sunlight, empty to the rim of the world. Far down the cliff, surf churned and boomed. We were only in time to see the little fount of spray that scattered a few jewels across the tide. Then nothing but surf.

It was quiet on the balcony, I can tell you that. Until Colonel Roelant lifted an arm and laid it across his nephew's shoulder. "I apologize, Lieutenant Roelant. She was a lady."

I will not forget the boy's face as I saw it then. "And she thought *I* was a gentleman," he whispered, "because—because I told those dogs in that wine cellar to remove their hats."

"She was a lady," the colonel said, taking off his cap.

Although I am equally certain old Iron Mask never guessed. On our way down out of the tower, the colonel started a hunt for any traces the Boche spy might have left behind. So we were not surprised to find blankets, food and a powerful wireless outfit hidden in a dungeon deep under the ruined

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walls. There was a Lüger gun on the stone table, and a pair of binoculars.

But that was not the only thing that was found. The next find was a little more surprising, and I made it myself, six days later when I was strolling along the beach about a mile from that dirty Arab port. All by myself on leave I was, and gloomily watching the horizon and the tide coming in; thinking of Paris and wishing I was there because it was May in the Bois de Boulogne.

My eye was on the horizon, I say, and I did not see it until I almost stepped on it. Then at first, when I did see it with the shallows lapping its fringe and the cockles and sand at its roots, I thought it was a weed. But a handful of sunshine came drifting up the beach, and when I caught the glint I could have yelled. I picked it up, and I cried like a baby as I held the thing in my hand. All the brine and tangle in the world had not put out the dark flame, *non!* had not extinguished that wine-colored glow. You comprehend? It was a wig.

OLD Thibaut Corday creaked back in his chair, tucked the snapshot of the Man with the Bald Head into his pocket, dragged out his pipe, and started the semblance of a brush-fire in his cinnamon beard. Out on Boulevard Sadi Carnot the couples strolled arm and arm in the dark. Laughter tinkled in the café. The *garçon* had stopped with balanced tray to speak to the little maiden at the cashier's desk; and she was amused.

It was the young British consulate attaché who choked on his drink. "Wig!"

The old Frenchman nodded cheerlessly.

"Then— Good God! It was *her* all the time. This dancing woman. Her face in the tower window. She—she didn't have any—"

"It was a beautiful wig," the ancient veteran growled.

"But, great Scott!" the Englishman blurted. "You mean to say she had an officer's cape hidden under her cloak; that when she ran into the tower she slipped it on. Up on the balcony she tossed it over the rail. And she staged a sham battle with herself up there. And shot herself, and—"

"It was the only thing that could have saved the life of the boy."

"But she was a German agent! A Boche spy! As the Man with the Bald Head—I mean, to kill herself like that for a mere—"

A harsh chuckle brought a bomb of smoke from the incendiary beard. "That is just the point of the story, *mon vieux*. Love—the real thing—is greater than wars or hates. I have no doubt Finette hated the French soldiers. But that young lieutenant, attend! And the springtime. There you are." Old Thibaut Corday shook his head. "I never told about the wig, my friends; that was her secret. The same way Colonel Roelant never told his nephew about the find *he* made.

"You comprehend, the colonel believed the woman had killed the Man with the Bald Head on that tower balcony. What the colonel wanted to know was how this bald-headed spy had managed to escape the garrison and make such a miraculous get-away on the night the Legion was after him. How did the spy get from the fort to the tower, a mile uphill, without being seen when the cliff was patrolled by the guards? Ha! So the colonel took a squad of us up to the tower and told us to poke around for a passage.

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"We found a passage, too. It led from that secret wireless room downhill and came out in a mound of rocks right under the garrison wall. All a spy would have had to do was scale over the wall in the dark, drop into that rabbit hole and let a slab of limestone rock that covered the entrance like a trapdoor fall after him."

Thibaut Corday grinned fiercely. "Which is just what the spy *had* done, my friends. But in his haste, that night of the alarm, he had let the rock fall over the hole too abruptly. Maybe it had slipped. Anyway it had slammed down on that hairless head of his and cracked it the way a brick would have cracked an egg. We found the Man with the Bald Head lying at the end of the tunnel under that slab, dead as a woodchuck. There were a lot of stolen documents in his pockets, and codes marked H-13."

Old Thibaut Corday poured a cognac into the brush-fire. "Finette never knew of any spy in the tower," he said softly. Then he stooped to pet the black and brown tom marching between his ankles, and when he looked up he was smiling. "The world," he chuckled, "goes on. There will be the same batches of kittens—"

THE END.

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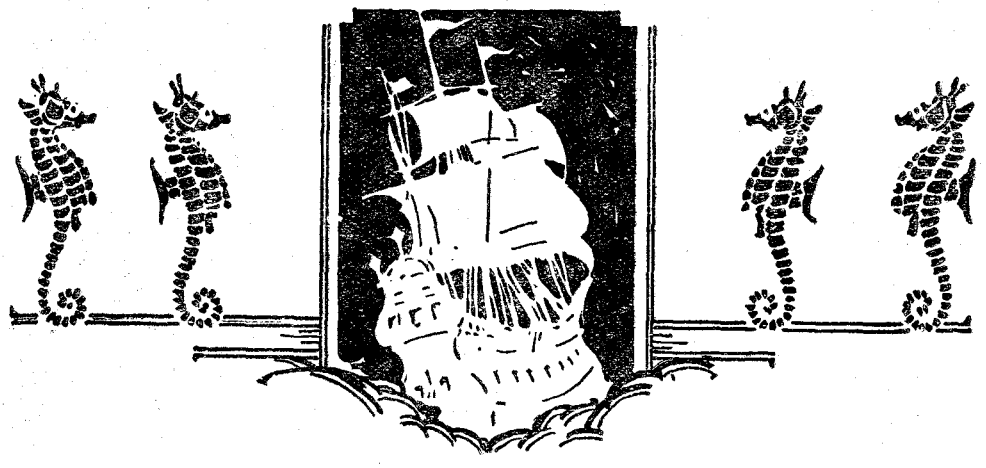
Money in Tigers

IN India, where a little wealth means financial independence to a native, the fellow who is lucky enough to slay a tiger is well fixed for years to come.

First of all, the government pays the hunter a bounty, ranging from ten to twenty-five pounds. The Chinese, who are very fond of the flesh, are willing to pay a high price for it. Certain Indians value the fat as a cure for rheumatism. Some of the bones and the claws have a value as ornaments. Warriors cherish the liver as an incitement to valor. And, if the tiger be of the "more deadly" gender, the milk is disposed of as a cure for blindness.

Last of all, some tourist is sure to purchase the skin.

—*J. Walter Briggs.*



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With complete abandon Goldenfur charged the murderer

Shade and the Glutton

By ELMER RANSOM

There was no fox in the wilds so wise as Shade, and no wolverine so crafty and cruel as the Glutton

SHADE kept his mysterious vigil while Goldenfur, his vixen, moaned a little and stirred restlessly on the leaves that lined their den. Against the light of a new moon, his black, silver-tipped fur danced with a living flame. His eyes glowed as they covered a moon-swept wilderness, shrouded in white; it was a cold world into which Goldenfur must usher her new-born.

Like some snow-dusted statue in ebony, the dog fox sat on his haunches, his marvelous ears alert to catch the slightest sound. His mate whimpered, and Shade dropped to the earth his head between his paws.

There was no fox on Old Baldy so wise as Shade, and none so beautiful; there was no vixen so desirable as Goldenfur, and Shade had battled to win and keep her. He had saved her from the wolf pack, had fought Scarface, the fiercest of the dog foxes, that he might have her; and she, in turn, had led the timber wolves, Graydeath and Shewolf, away from him and to his rival when he was wounded sorely and closely beset. So they understood each other, these two; Shade, a silver fox, and Goldenfur, his mate, a red fox.

Goldenfur cried out and he rose from the entrance and went back to her. There he stood, his ermine-tipped tail drooping, his ears down, his head lowered. Shade touched her face with his muzzle. She snapped at him. Without resenting this, he re-

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turned to his position where he could listen for approaching danger and scent out enemies who might try to creep upon them.

He was hungry, for winter was sluggish and lay far into the spring, its white hand heavy with hoarfrost and death. Game was scarce. Last night he had killed a snowshoe rabbit, bringing it warm and bleeding to Goldenfur. To-night he would not leave the den.

There was a short, sharp cry behind him. Unheeding, he kept his position. There was nothing more for a long time. Then he heard Goldenfur move and whine. He went to her and found five small, furry bundles nestled close against her body. Goldenfur licked them gently with her rough tongue. He nosed them ever so little, and she snapped at him again.

Shade pushed her head away with his paw, and Goldenfur took his leg in her teeth, holding it firmly without biting. He put his nose quite close to that of his mate, and she released him and rested her head against his for a moment. Then she gave her full attention to her new charges. Shade went out of the den and circled to the top of the bluff just above.

Some wild emotion stirred him. In his body was a curious ache he had felt before but could never fathom. Into his blood leaped some strange substance charging him with the potence of his race. He raised his beautiful head to the low moon and sent his voice echoing across the timberlands. The ecstasy of creation, that nameless mystery of all the ages, was upon the dog fox.

THE fox is always a good father. Each year Shade helped his mate to raise their young; hunted the hills and valleys that they might have food; and, with Goldenfur, taught them to hunt, until in the late fall when they were matured they might shift for themselves. In that inscrutable scheme of nature, his love for the youngsters would fade as the autumn came, so that the parting was natural and unfelt. But each spring he knew the same exultance that marked him to-night and which he vented in his wild challenge to the moon.

Yet never before had he and his mate faced such a season. Even the wolf pack had gone south into the valleys. The struggle for existence had been even more bitter in a land where living was never easy. Thus nature tested her children and improved the breed of the wild. Among the flesh-eaters, only the most cunning or the fastest or the strongest could find their food, and among the lesser denizens of the great wilderness only the clever and the swift could escape. The eternal battle for survival, that to the individual appears so cruel and ruthless, was the way of nature; so planned that the creatures of field and forest should grow more fit; that only the best could live to reproduce their kind. And in this bitter and eternal struggle none was more fit than Shade.

Shade was not new to the north country; it had suckled him; its moods and its constant menace were a part of his existence. There were times in every winter, however hard, when he would kill more than he needed, and with the same instinct that makes a dog bury a bone, he would hide it. This he did with cunning, covering his kill deep in the snow. Shade knew that little life moved over the frozen silence; his ears brought him nothing but the sigh of the north wind in the spire-like spruce trees, and there was no warm body scent in the air.

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His vixen must be fed if she would nourish their progeny. Memory stirred. There was food to be had; food that the conservatism of a bitter wilderness had made him save against such an hour. He turned his head slowly, nosing the air with care, then moved east, dropping down the slope toward the valley.

He had gone for nearly a mile when he stopped suddenly. A nauseous musk was in the air and his fur bristled. Slowly he went forward and the stench grew. He circled his cache. Gulo, the Glutton, had been there before him, and no animal will touch food where Gulo has defiled the surrounding snow, save when driven to it by the direst extremity.

Shade's lips drew back, curling over his sharp, gleaming teeth, and a low snarl came from his throat. Yet he must have known the hopelessness of his gesture, for he was no match in strength for the wolverine.

Shade circled, and, picking up the scent of the prowler on the other side, followed it rapidly until he came in sight of the animal that had stolen his hidden store of meat. Gulo, the wolverine, sometimes known among men as *Carcajou,* was heavier than Shade. His legs were short and husky; his feet broad, each armed with five stout, sharp claws, and he pushed them ahead in a sinuous shuffle, making a double line of bearlike tracks. He was one compact mass of slow-moving, well-powered muscle, finely cloaked in long brown fur that was almost black. His face was short, with wide-set, staring eyes. It had a certain apelike quality that was at once loathsome and ugly. The same wilderness could hardly have produced two animals so unlike in all save one dominant characteristic—cunning.

The Indians say that in the wolverine lurks the evil spirit.

A NERVOUSNESS possessed Shade that had nothing to do with Gulo, because the speed of the fox made him safe from the attack of his clumsy competitor. It was on this eastern slope that Shade had got the man scent; here that he had felt the sting of a rifle bullet; here that he had seen Sable, a pine marten, caught under a deadfall, so that he moved with infinite caution. Gulo, ahead of him, lumbered casually along; he was well fed, thanks to Shade, and contented with his night of prowling.

Shade watched him, a strange light in his amber eyes, his lips still drawn back, every muscle alert. Gulo stopped where a semicircular line of sticks stuck upright in the snow. He smelled them cautiously, approaching from the outside of the part circle. Then with his heavy paws he began to systematically rip the stakes away. Shade took the wind from Gulo to him and crawled toward the wolverine; when he stopped he lay close to the blanketed ground, shielded by a snow-covered bush.

When Gulo had torn the smaller sticks away he reached his paw forward, pushing a mass of loose snow, and a large log that had leaned on end above and within the stakes crashed down. Shade jumped at the sound, but Gulo apparently knew quite well what he was about. He reached under the log and drew forth a slab of frozen meat which he threw aside for the moment. Shade licked out his tongue. Up the hill was his den, and there Goldenfur waited with her young.

With a slow and maddening patience Gulo tore out every bit of the trap. Some of the sticks he placed to one

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side; others he broke deliberately. At times he would stop and raise his head, displaying through his partly open mouth two regular rows of teeth, with the projecting upper and lower fangs that his lips could never quite hide. Time was no matter to Gulo.

Carefully the fox backed away from his position and approached the methodical wolverine from the side. He was within a few paces when Gulo lifted his nose. Something was wrong; the back of the wolverine arched like that of an angry cat; his mouth opened soundlessly.

In one leap the fox hurled himself on the prize with which the trap had been baited. The wolverine growled and jumped forward, but he was too late. With the meat in his mouth Shade sped up the hill.

In the wilderness there is a fine sensitiveness to danger. It was Shade's first close contact with a wolverine, but he knew as certainly as though it had been his thousandth that now he must use every care to foil his clumsy antagonist. The fox is safe from the slower animal save when the young are in the den. At that time the wolverine will search out the hiding place and will often kill the mother and all the pups. How Shade could be aware of this no one can say, save that it be a part of that strange racial memory that serves the wild folks so well. The fox did not underestimate his antagonist. Slow of body, almost lazy in his movements; there was no creature in all the north country more cunning, not even Shade himself, and none with Gulo's infinite patience and persistence.

IT was a half-moon later that Shade saw Gulo again. A new wariness possessed the fox. He knew there were few animals who could get to his whelps to do them harm, but instinctively he knew that Gulo was one of them and the most dangerous. For Gulo rarely forgot and rarely gave up a quest, particularly when the picking was so poor as at present.

Shade saw him on the same slope where they had met before. Gulo was at a sprung steel trap in which struggled a pine marten. The marten is one animal that few of the carnivora will eat unless driven to it by actual starvation, yet Gulo killed the animal and devoured it. Then he tore the trap loose and dragged it away. Shade followed and saw him hide the trap in the snow, and later saw him steal the bait from a deadfall and destroy the set.

It was strange that Shade should have followed the wolverine. It may have been some unusual curiosity with which the wild children are plentifully endowed; it may have been an unconscious act, to assure himself that Gulo was not searching for the fox den. Certainly Shade neither needed nor possessed the power to comprehend what Gulo did to the traps; indeed it is unlikely that Gulo understood his own perverse habits.

Yet he took an insane delight in destruction. Another inexplicable part of his nature was that he would steal, carry away, hide or destroy things for which he could have no possible use. A line of traps once visited by a wolverine must be abandoned or the animal must be killed before trapping operations can continue. And to kill or trap him is difficult indeed.

Shade's interest in Gulo had begun to flag when the hot body scent of a ptarmigan or willow grouse came to him. He turned his head and worked slowly into the wind. Thus Gulo caught the scent of the fox. Shade veered to the left, his head high like

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that of a quail dog. Gulo now followed the fox, his little eyes agleam.

At length the dog fox crouched low and crept forward, his belly almost touching the snow. Shade's mouth, partly open, watered in anticipation. His progress was slow, almost catlike. Gulo came closer, but in the eagerness of the trail Shade disregarded him. Gulo had no notion of attack, but he did know that, somewhere on Old Baldy, Shade had a mate and that fox pups were young and tender.

The fox hesitated one final second. His beautiful black brush, tipped with white, was straight and stiff behind him. Then he sprang forward. There was a beating of wings as his teeth closed on their prey. Then Shade made a mistake, a terrible and costly mistake. With the hot blood from the ptarmigan in his throat, the feel of the warm, soft feathers against his lips, and the instinctive idea of Goldenfur and her pups in his mind, he forgot Gulo.

IT was not long before he had covered the distance to the den. Goldenfur, whose hunting was limited and who had not made a kill, whined in welcome as he entered the small front opening, and he dropped the bird before her. She attacked it ravenously, the two of them sharing the meal.

Both animals were hungry, and the bird was hardly enough to stay the appetite of one. Shade slipped again through the opening. Later Goldenfur rose and went to the front of the den. Her puppies, denied the warmth of her body, whined in protest, but she stood looking into the night. She had no hint of an enemy, no knowledge of danger, yet some feeling of fear possessed her. Perhaps Shade had crossed the trail of Gulo and had brought the taint with him; hardly perceptible but enough to stir the memory of the vixen. And as she stood there, her nose into the wind, she caught the full scent of her enemy.

Goldenfur dropped back to her whelps, and her body was aquiver when it curled around them. The head and shoulders of the wolverine blocked the irregular outline of the entrance. The opening proved too small for his stout body, and he backed away, sniffing the air from the den. In a short time she heard him above where a smaller tunnel opened, and then he reappeared before her.

He began to dig at the hard front of the cavern, and Goldenfur snarled at him. She rose, her fur bristling and her eyes gleaming with the deadly ferocity that the vixen shows when her whelps are in danger. The wolverine paid no attention to her, but continued his work. Slowly he was enlarging the opening and his head and shoulders were well within the narrow space. Here the cave narrowed again, opening up where the vixen stood. To her left was a shelflike compartment that she and Shade had dug out, and it was littered with bones and feathers. Beyond this was a narrow tunnel leading upward and appearing at the surface of the ground some ten feet above.

Only the cramped opening stayed the wolverine at all. In many of the caverns into which foxes go the wolverine can follow, but Shade was more than an ordinary fox, and with the canny sense of survival that comes to the wariest of nature's children, he and his vixen had chosen this "earth." At the best, however, Goldenfur had but a few moments and he would be upon her.

The hot breath of the Glutton steamed close, and Goldenfur snarled. He merely opened his mouth, exposing

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his wicked, even teeth and his strong canine fangs. It was dark, with but a dim filtering of reflected snow-light, but the eyes of Gulo were built for the dark, and those of Goldenfur were better accustomed to it than to the light of day.

The vixen picked the pups up one at a time and put them on the ledge. Then she stepped to the shelf herself, hesitated a second, and taking one of the young foxes in her mouth ran along the narrow tunnel and deposited it in the open.

FROM behind came the cry of her puppies and the sound of breaking bones. Quickly she ran back along the narrow tunnel. Gulo was crouched with his legs outspread, his belly close to the ground, his back arched, his mouth open. There was no whimper and no movement from the pups that he covered. With complete abandon the vixen charged.

Her teeth clicked against those of the wolverine, and he bit her savagely through the lower jaw. She snarled and snapped at his throat, but the heavy fur turned her aside, and his mouth closed on her upper leg. It was a fatal place, for in the wilderness a broken leg, in most cases, means a dead animal. Goldenfur twisted her body quickly away and bit through Gulo's ear. The wolverine lost his grip and struck with a front paw, ripping Goldenfur from the top of her head to her nose.

The fox yelped and jumped back, panting. From above came the whine of her puppy, alone and cold in the outer air. It saved her life, for she turned into the tunnel and Gulo was unable to follow. The vixen was torn and shaken by the short, savage fight.

Goldenfur, coming to the whelp, picked up the youngster and made her way down the incline. The blood pounded through her body. Every instinct urged her to return to the den, where the broken bodies of her babies lay under the claws of Gulo. Only that precious life in her mouth stayed her; only that made her circle until she found the trail of her mate.

She followed him down the slope until the trail broke away to the north. She moved for a time at an angle to this new direction, then stopped where the roots of a windfall gave her protection, and, dropping the whelp, raised her voice to the night. It was a peculiar note that she sent over the sharp air; the high, questioning bark of a fox in trouble. Then she covered her puppy with her warm body.

Soon she heard something move over the crusted snow and she barked again. Shade trotted into view. The dog fox was puzzled. He sniffed her coat and found the rank smell of the Glutton. When she rose he nosed the puppy and the small fox yelped. It wanted again the body warmth of its mother.

Shade turned toward the den so recently quitted by Goldenfur, and the vixen nipped him sharply; but he gave no heed. The vixen barked. Shade looked back at her, his head in the air, and she seemed satisfied, for she picked up the pup and went along the slope. There was another den that she and Shade had used before.

The dog fox went to the mouth of the earth. Before he reached it he knew well enough what had happened. He stopped at the entrance. From within came the crunching of bones as Gulo held his feast. The hair rose on Shade's neck. His lips curled and he vented one low snarl. Then he turned and headed back to his mate, finding her as he expected at the den they used before, nursing her lone pup. Shade

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lay down beside her and licked her wounds. Over them hovered the shadow of the wolverine.

THERE was another on Old Baldy who had no love for Gulo. Old Pierre Gillet, the trapper, had stayed beyond his usual time because the late spring would not let him out, and Gulo had destroyed his trap line. It was no new experience to Pierre. He had met wolverines before, and believed all the fabulous stories that concerned the animal. Had he not dug deep in the snow and fixed a special set for Gulo, removing every trace of the man scent? And had not Gulo stolen the bait without being caught?

Yet the ways of the wilderness are strange. Pierre Gillet, who could be expected to have no part in any drama among the folks of the wilderness, save to take the skins of those unwary ones that were caught in his traps, was destined to be the unconscious actor in the final episode between Gulo and the foxes; nor was Gulo's destruction of Pierre's traps without significance in this concluding scene.

For as Pierre Gillet made his way back to his cabin at noon one day, he noticed, well up on a hillside bluff, that the snow had melted and frozen again around a small opening in the rocks. The trapper had seen the opening many times before. His experience in the wilderness told him a great deal, but nothing of the true story. He knew that the signs marked the den of some animal, lately moved in; that the heat from their bodies and their breath melted the snow that was now smoothed again into an even, icy covering. Climbing the bluff, he found a few dim tracks and knew that foxes were denned in the hole.

The pelt was beyond its prime, but perhaps this was the silver fox, and Pierre coveted the skin. It was worth while even now. Pierre pondered the reason for the new abode; no ordinary thing could have caused such a move.

Swinging the one steel trap he carried from his shoulder, he dug into the snow and set it before the opening, without bait, hobbling it to a near-by bush. Then he covered it carefully and left.

Inside the den, Shade was wakened by the digging and edged forward. Faintly the man scent came to him, filling him with uneasiness so that he lay quite still until the footsteps of Gillet died away. Then he closed his eyes and slept again.

With the coming of night he roused and stretched himself. He nosed Goldenfur, standing muzzle to muzzle with her. Soon she might hunt with him, but now only one impulse filled her, the care of the only pup left to them. Her hunting was done near the den and was almost fruitless. If Gulo gained entrance here it was a fight to the death, for there was no escape.

Shade went to the mouth of the earth and sniffed the air. Something stirred faintly within him; perhaps his memory of the morning, so he stood there uncertain. However good his eyesight, the fox ordinarily relies on his nose and his ears. Thus it is unlikely that Shade noticed the disturbed snow, but he was aware that something was wrong. He put one foot forward and it sank deeper than it should. Quickly he drew back.

Moving carefully, he circled the mouth of the den, keeping his feet on the unbroken crust. Outside he approached from the far side. Here was a menace he could not comprehend, but he was conscious of it. Finally he trotted away to his hunting.

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The whisper of migrant wings overhead told Shade that the lean time was passing. The melting of snow on the southern slopes during the noon hours hinted of a season long delayed. With all its promise, however, hunger was still abroad.

By persistent digging Gulo had caught a few lemmings and mice, but he had known only a little food since the adventure with the foxes. The old trap line was bare.

Thus it was that when Gulo struck the fresh trail of the silver fox he back-tracked toward the den. The wolverine was smart enough to know that following the dog fox thus early in the night would lead him nowhere. Gulo did not hurry.

SHADE, returning later with his kill, struck his own earlier trail when he was close to the den. He knew that Gulo was in front of him, and was moving toward the earth where Goldenfur and the pup waited. The fox sped faster, and when he came to the foot of the slope he saw above him the shadow of Gulo, weaving his serpentine way toward the opening in the cliff.

The warning bark of the silver fox echoed across the hills, and Gulo turned. Then he increased his pace. Gulo was hungry and he would eat despite all the foxes. Goldenfur, standing at the mouth of the den, snarled as Gulo approached. The wolverine, with Shade climbing rapidly behind him, and with the promise of food ahead, lost his customary caution. He plunged into the soft snow and the teeth of the concealed trap snapped shut, biting deep into the stout leg of the prowler.

Gulo went over in the snow, biting at the strange thing that held him. Shade charged straight at the furious animal, but before he could reach him Gulo rose, took the trap in his mouth and, on three legs, lunged into the den until he was brought up sharply by the hobble.

Here it was that Shade caught him. The fox was unaware of the handicap of his enemy. His mate and his cub were in the den, and Gulo, the Glutton, was bent on their destruction. That Gulo was more powerful, that it would not be possible to kill him except by the wildest chance, made no difference. The surge of parenthood drove the silver fox to attack.

Reaching Gulo from behind, he cut the wolverine a dozen times with his flashing, rapier-like teeth before the animal could turn. When Gulo did manage to face him, the wolverine was unable to use his feet with their terrible claws, and the fox, jumping in and out, cut him again and again.

Instinctively Gulo pulled away from his attacker, dragging the trap a few inches. Then it was that Goldenfur, backed close against the far wall, sprang forward. The vixen slashed his side, but Gulo caught her in his jaws and bit through the muscles in her shoulder, pinning her securely. Goldenfur cried out and tried to break away. Thoroughly maddened by the plight of his mate, Shade stood just above his foe and cut through the heavy fur with his sharp teeth.

Gulo released his hold on Goldenfur and snapped at Shade, but the fox sprang entirely over him; then, quickly lowering his head, he struck forward and upward, opening a long gash in Gulo's side. Shade and Goldenfur now fought shoulder to shoulder. Vaguely, Shade began to see that Gulo could not move forward into the den; that in some strange way the wolverine was handicapped, but the wilderness

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has no place for mercy; its one great command is to survive.

THE wolverine tried to break out, but the two foxes crowded him until he was forced to fight back. Bleeding from a dozen wounds, he realized that the fight was going against him and that he must get away.

Goldenfur again dashed in and this time he caught her in the throat. But for a quick turn of her agile body his teeth would have severed one of the deep arteries. As it was, he held her powerless. The vixen could not cry out.

Shade, desperate, realizing fully the peril of his mate caught in the vise-like jaws of the killer, sprang at the back of the neck of the wolverine. Short-necked and hard-muscled as Gulo was, Shade forced his teeth through fur and sinew, until this crushing, deadly grip, so unusual in the fighting fox, struck the vital nerve center just below the skull. A tremor passed over the body of the wolverine. His jaws relaxed. He made one final effort to turn on the dog fox. Then his muscles convulsed as Shade released his grip and cut the wolverine about the face.

These last were futile blows, for Gulo was no longer conscious. In a few moments the body of the Glutton relaxed and he ceased to breathe.

The two foxes retreated to the far corner of the den and Goldenfur dropped panting to the floor. Finally she rose unsteadily. Her pup whined and she licked its face, then rubbed her muzzle against that of her mate. Then she took the whelp in her mouth and followed Shade into the night.

Shade's fur was bloody where Gulo had scored him, but his head was up, his ears cocked, and his beautiful brush flagged high. Had he not killed Gulo? Nor did he credit any part of his conquest to Pierre Gillet, the trapper; Pierre Gillet, who to-morrow would scratch his head over this puzzle of the wild and who would tell strange tales about it.

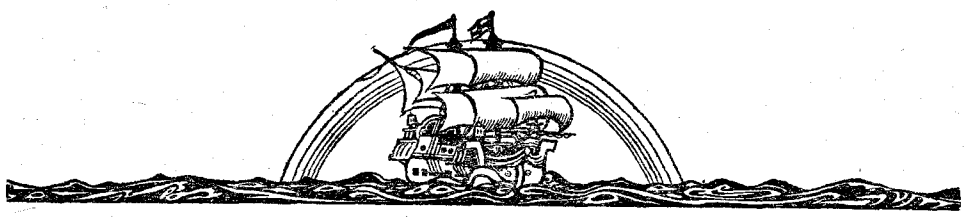
Again the whisper of wings in the starlit sky told Shade their troubles were almost over, and he trotted confidently ahead in search of another den where spring at last would find them.

THE END

Magnifying Eyes

A MAN with eyes that magnify more than a hundred times has been fitted with demagnifying glasses. When he isn't wearing the glasses, Alvah Mason of Minot, Maine, can see the pores of his skin and holes in a newspaper. He is especially good at phonograph records—can pick out the anvil in "Anvil Chorus" and can tell one dance orchestra from another by the smoothness of the curves in the sound groove. Mason says that when he is without glasses a record groove looks like the path made by dragging a finger through soft mud.

J. W. Holden.



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The Devil and the Deep

By FRED MacISAAC

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A white powder dribbled into Francho's glass

More sinister and complicated grows the intrigue on the round-the-world schooner that has gangsters for rulers

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHAT started out to be a happy, carefree voyage around the world turned into dangerous adventure shortly after the schooner Sappho sailed out of San Francisco Bay and headed for Tahiti. Captain Ray Rollins had gotten seven men and women to pay him $200 apiece for the trip, with the provision that they help him man the ship, but at the last moment he took aboard two gangsters, Leon Francho and John Casey, who were fleeing, with a large sum of money, from Federal prosecution.

The two racketeers paid Captain Rollins a large amount to change his course and take them to South America, then they virtually took control of the schooner. They took over the captain's cabin, confiscated all guns, and announced that they were running things.

Captain Rollins and his wife, Geraldine, themselves crooks, naturally resented this, but not as much as did Tom Baker, one of the seven passengers. When Baker resented Francho's attentions to Lucy Stevens, another of the passengers, the two men fought. Baker might have won, but a large diamond ring worn by Francho cut his face and blinded him. Francho was about to kill him when Lucy intervened.

Others on the schooner were Cynthia Swanson, a writer; Mr. and Mrs. William Ryder, recently married; Thornton Yates, a Los Angeles real estate man;

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Claude Cummings, a youngster; and the mate, Holdenburg, who was, Tom Baker believed, a man wanted for murder.

Francho and Casey have just invited Lucy Stevens and Miss Swanson to a party in their cabin.

CHAPTER XIV.

LUCY SPEAKS HER MIND.

LUCY leaped from her camp stool and her dark eyes met Francho's darker ones steadfastly.

"You're not my boss and I do as I please," she said sharply. Color crept into his olive cheeks; she saw the devil peep out of his eyes and vanish and then he smiled at her pleadingly, like a disturbingly handsome boy.

"Sure you do," he said cajolingly. "Will you please come?"

She hesitated. She had power over him. Arrogant as he was, he wanted to please her. And, as Miss Swanson had said, the people on the ship were at the man's mercy.

"There must be a chaperon," he stated finally. "Mrs. Rollins."

"Holy smoke, have a heart!"

"Mrs. Rollins must be there. After all, you are eating her private stores. You admit that."

He grinned. "Well, anything to satisfy you."

"And I want your promise that it will be a nice party," she said, quick to follow up her advantage. "Your friend is rude and rough. At the first sign of roughness, I shall leave."

"And so shall I," declared Miss Swanson.

"Jack will behave himself, ladies. You leave that to me. Miss Stevens, how about you and me taking a turn up and down the deck?"

"You don't have to do that," Miss Swanson told him roguishly. "I must go in and decide what I shall wear."

Leon promptly dropped into the writer's vacant chair.

"You've been sore on me since the scrap," he said bluntly. "Well, I don't blame you, kid. I'm sorry."

"You were fiendishly brutal."

"Now, sister! When a couple of men put up their dukes, they have to be brutal. This guy is taller and stronger than I. I had to keep away and peck at him. And the fight was on before I thought about my ring. I could have cut him up without the damn ring."

"You were rude and insulting. Mr. Baker had a right to talk to me, just as much right as you had. You ordered him away. Of course he resented it."

"Listen. I'm stuck on you. I think you're the swellest girl I ever lamped. When I came on this old tub and got an eyeful of you my heart did a double somersault, honest it did. And I went wild when I saw this stiff whispering in your ear."

"He wasn't whispering in my ear."

"Well, anyhow, back where I come from, people clear the gangway when they see me coming. I mean I'm the Big Shot. I realize he didn't know that."

She turned hot eyes on him. "You're no big shot to me. And no friend of mine can insult another friend of mine."

"Maybe this guy is all right," he admitted. "Maybe I'm all wrong."

"You've put it perfectly."

"Well, to show that I'm square I'll go up to the feller and apologize. Say, I was a snappy middleweight in my time. I had it all over the best of them, but there was more dough in another racket. I like a man that can take it. I kind of admired him when he was staggering around, blind but game. I'll

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tell him so. I'll tell him I'm sorry. How's that?"

"Why don't you invite him to the party?" she asked, smiling broadly.

"Aw, say, you don't want me to do that? I'm darned if I'll do that."

"Inviting some of us and not all will create hard feelings," Lucy reminded him.

FRANCHO laughed loudly. "Should I worry about their feelings? Kid, can I talk straight to you?"

She nodded.

"I sized this captain and his dame up for a couple of chiselers as soon as he gave me the glad hand and turned that greasy smile on. I read what was in his mind as though he had a glass forehead.

"When I took out my wallet to pay him for the passage money I twigged the gleam in his eye. He figured on knocking us on the head and pitching us overboard."

"Oh, I'm sure you are mistaken."

"Like heck I am. Now, let me tell you something. Where do you suppose you people get off after they have murdered us and copped our jack, eh? He can't have you around to peach on him. I don't know whether he expects to sink this ship and leave you on it to drown like rats or what, but he can't leave you alive. Say, for Heaven's sake, don't faint!"

"I—I don't believe you," she murmured. "It's too awful."

"It ain't going to happen. The best thing for any of you is that we came on board, kid. I'm taking care of the whole caboodle of you—even this bum, Baker. I'm a guy who beats the other fellow to the punch. I sized up these rats right away. First thing, I moved into his cabin where a man would have a chance. Next, I took his guns away from him. There ain't going to be no trouble. You don't have to worry about anything."

"I'm sure—"

"You be sure I'm looking after you. But Jack and me, we're going ashore in Quento—"

"Quento? But we are bound for Tahiti."

"Quento in Ecuador is where we're going. I hate to think of you girls left on board after that. We're paying him a thousand bucks apiece to take us down there. Do you suppose this crook will carry you around the world for two hundred?"

"But he must. It's our contract."

Francho laughed scornfully. "I'm a decent fellow, kid," he assured her. "I never messed round with dames—much. The kind we meet in our game ain't to be trusted. I never had a chance to know your kind of a girl. Will you give me a break?"

"You know," she said thoughtfully, "I think, way down underneath, you're nice."

To her astonishment, the man's eyes filled with tears.

"Say, you're swell," he muttered. "Anybody that knows me will tell you they don't have to have my name on a piece of paper. I do what I say. I don't go looking for trouble. When people muscle in on me they get it plenty, but that's business. Do you know what I'm hoping? That you'll get to like me."

"I'm sorry now for the names I called you. But the poor boy couldn't see. His face was covered with blood and you were going to keep on hitting him."

"In a fight you get kind of crazy. You have to finish your man. All I was going to do was to drop him with a

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right to the heart. I quit when you grabbed me, didn't I?"

Lucy gave him her hand. "I'll come to your party," she promised, "and you have given me your word that it will be a nice party."

"One raw crack out of that lunkhead Casey," he said firmly, "and I drop him for the count. But we don't have to have that horse-faced dame, do we?"

"We do," declared Lucy definitely. "We're not going to visit you in your cabin without a chaperon."

"O.K., sister, O.K."

CHAPTER XV.

COUNCIL OF WAR.

THERE were shadows on the forecastle head. Tom Baker was on lookout. Claude Cummings was at the wheel. In the cabin, the party was on. It was a hot night and the cabin exit to the deck was open. It was a larger party than Francho had planned because it occurred to him that Mrs. Ryder, who was a pretty young woman, would be forced to occupy her stateroom off the cabin and would hear the sounds of revelry and feel badly about it. And, to demonstrate to Lucy Stevens what a good fellow he was, he invited Mr. Ryder.

Thornton Yates, than whom nobody more enjoyed good food and wine, was alone, sulking and trying to sleep in the forecastle. Baker, in a black rage, gazed into the night.

The big crook was celebrating his victory of the morning and Lucy Stevens was attending the celebration. She knew what he was. There was no excuse for her. She was like all the rest of the women, fascinated by a handsome face, indifferent to the character of its owner, ready to eat, drink and be merry with any one.

She figured Tom Baker to be a worthless chap, penniless, or he wouldn't have signed up for a cruise like this. And she was looking out for the main chance. This bootlegger had plenty of money. Money—that was all women cared about. Money to buy clothes and jewels, to live soft. Well, let her have her gangster. She'd find out. She would regret she had ignored a good man's love. Still, she didn't know he loved her. A girl can't be carried away by a man with whom she has exchanged only a few words and who gets beaten up by a smaller, smarter man.

In short, Tom Baker was in an indigo mood, and the occasional bursts of laughter from the cabin aft didn't serve to lighten it.

The first shadow resolved itself into the mate, Holdenburg. The second turned out to be Captain Rollins. They slipped up beside the man at the bow silently and he only became aware of their presence when Holdenburg touched him on the shoulder.

"We want to have a talk with you, Tom," he said.

"A conference. What you might call a council of war," added Captain Rollins.

Baker welcomed them joyfully. "Let's do something. Now!" he exclaimed. "Let's rush them!"

"Now, now," chided the captain, "get hold of yourself, my boy. Nothing rash."

"Damn it, she's in there. Drinking with them. Think what's going to happen!" Baker exclaimed, almost in tears.

"Nothing is going to happen," said Rollins sternly. "And please remember that Geraldine is there. My wife."

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"Well, go in and get her out of there," pleaded Baker.

THE mate threw an arm over the seaman's shoulder. "Calm down," he commanded. "The skipper is right. There are only three of us, Baker. If we rushed them they'd shoot us like dogs and some of the bullets might hit the women."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Tom. "I'm half crazy, I guess. What are we going to do?"

"We've changed our course," said Captain Rollins. "I'm planning to put these brutes ashore on one of the Revillagigedo Islands. They are uninhabited, and a ship doesn't touch at the one I have in mind once in half a dozen years."

"And how are you going to manage that?" demanded Baker.

"We'll overpower them at the first opportunity, put them in irons and maroon them. Can you think of a better plan?"

"You can't overpower them without rushing them."

"We can't rush guns, Baker," said Holdenburg. "We'll get a chance in a day or two. They will relax their vigilance."

"But in the meantime, what about the women?"

"Nothing will happen to them. Geraldine tells me that Francho is head over heels in love with Lucy Stevens. He is anxious to make a good impression on her. He assured her that this affair would be most decorous. He promised her to suppress Casey, to permit nothing to occur to mar the pleasure of an innocent evening."

"The girl has him eating out of her hand," added the mate. "What we want you to do is to induce her to join our little conspiracy. Make her realize that her safety depends upon our making these rascals prisoners."

"Persuade her to play Delilah," pleaded the captain. "In a good cause, of course. The whole thing depends on her."

"Just how?"

"Well, induce her to walk on deck with him on a dark night—hold him in conversation until we get a chance to overpower him. Once we have Francho helpless and disarmed, we'll be in a position to attend to Casey."

"If she didn't like the brute she wouldn't be drinking his wine up there," retorted Baker.

"My dear boy, she had no choice. He could force her presence and she realized it. She stipulated that Geraldine be present as chaperon, and then induced him to invite the Ryders. A really clever girl. A brilliant girl, Baker. And I'm certain she admires you."

"We've got to get him out on deck at night," argued the mate. "Rushing the captain's cabin is impossible. Once we have Francho, we can besiege Casey. Starve him out, if it proves necessary."

"And after we've marooned the pair, what?" demanded Baker.

"Why, we set a course for Tahiti and after that Australia, as we have planned."

It was too dark to see their faces, but Baker didn't have to. He knew that the precious pair hoped to make a cat's-paw of him, after which he would have to look out for himself.

"Why not go into Mazatlan? It's only a few days' sail. Turn them over to the authorities for extradition. Why maroon them? Suppose they starve to death on this island?"

"Man alive, either of them would shoot you as quickly as he would look

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at you," declared the mate. "Don't be chicken-hearted."

TOM was silent. In his opinion Francho and Casey were the greater evil. He had to ally himself with Rollins and Holdenburg. He might find a way to compel them to land not only the gangsters but the members of the cruise at Mazatlan or a Central American port.

It was fairly obvious why these scoundrels wished to maroon the gangsters. Francho and Casey had come aboard well heeled financially, and Rollins had no intention of landing their baggage with them. The two passengers had been wise to disarm the precious skipper and his mate. Once they had the fugitives in their power, it wasn't unlikely that they would maroon the Happy Family along with them. Rollins, Holdenburg and Geraldine could easily sail the Sappho to Mazatlan from these uninhabited Mexican Islands, ship a couple of seamen and go on to a South American port with their loot.

"I'm not a fool," he said sharply. "You're planning to grab their money. I imagine they have a very large sum in their possession."

"My dear boy," said the captain reproachfully, "I'm trying to resume command of my ship. Nothing is farther from my thoughts—"

"Skip it," snapped Holdenburg. "You're quite right, Baker. We want their money. We'll cut you in. How's that?"

"Mr. Holdenburg—" began the captain indignantly.

"Bah! Baker has your number. Listen, Tom. These two racketeers have bags full of swag with them. The American government will jail them. Nobody gives a damn what happens to them. They have killed and stolen to get this money, but, if the authorities get them it will go to their filthy relatives. They came secretly aboard this ship. If they disappear, no questions will be asked. If you hadn't been broke, Baker, you wouldn't have shipped on this cruise. Couldn't you use twenty or thirty thousand dollars?"

"Yes, I could use it."

"Good. You'll get it. Francho understands the situation perfectly, which is why he has collected all the weapons on board and moved into the skipper's quarters. He'll shoot us down without hesitation if we make a move against him. He knows every man's hand is against him. He's a lone wolf, at least alone with this Casey. Technically, they are both mutineers. I assure you there is no legal comeback if we overpower them and dump them on this island. We would be acquitted by any jury if we killed them in a battle to regain control of the ship."

"That's quite right, Baker," added the captain. "Now that you fully understand the situation, you realize why we must not make a false move?"

"And you're with us?" demanded the mate.

"Yes," said Tom in a low voice. "I'm with you."

"Keep out of the fellow's way. You'll get warning when we are ready to act. Now keep a sharp watch."

With this the skipper and mate descended to the main deck.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PARTY.

A SUCCESSION of bad meals caused the eyes of three pretty young women, who came out of their staterooms in their best dresses

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and gazed upon the dining saloon table, to glisten.

Casey had gone into the galley after the regular dinner of salt pork, ship's bread, plum duff and black coffee had been served to the crew. He had opened cans with ruthless disregard for conservation.

There were platters of cold chicken and cold ham. There were soda biscuits plastered with glossy black caviar. There was canned Boston brown bread. Canned fresh butter. Beside each plate stood a wine glass, and in a small tub filled with cracked ice lay a half dozen quarts of champagne.

Leon Francho stood at the head of the table. He wore dinner clothes. Francho wore evening clothes as though he had been born with a gold spoon in his mouth and never had had to sell newspapers as a child on New York's East Side.

While Lucy Stevens was fully aware that he was a very dangerous person and no good could come of his penchant for her, being a woman, she had donned an evening dress which had cost her more than she could afford a few months back and in which she was ravishingly beautiful. It was a form-fitting, low-cut affair of black satin and red which enhanced the loveliness of her dark hair and eyes and red lips and snowy teeth.

She had spent half an hour on her nails and hands which kitchen police had injured considerably and she had applied mascara, lipstick and rouge. And, for that matter, so had Mrs. Ryder, who loved her young husband, and who was frightened to death of the sinister hosts, and Miss Swanson, who was afraid of them and liked the thrill she got from being afraid, and Geraldine, whose intentions in regard to the passengers were not exactly healthy.

Geraldine's lips tightened at the sight of the lavish display of her canned ham and chicken and caviar, but she consoled herself with the thought that Francho and Casey would eventually pay for them.

"Everybody sit down," commanded Francho. "Casey, open the first bottle and don't spill any of it. Miss Stevens, you sit right here next to me. Miss Swanson, you take the chair on this side of me. Jack, you sit between Miss Swanson and Mrs. Ryder. Oh, hello, Ryder." The young husband had just entered from the deck. "You sit between Miss Stevens and Mrs. Rollins. Atta boy, Jack. Pour!"

Casey poured and then put a jazz record on the portable phonograph, after which he plopped down between the authoress and the young wife. He placed his right arm over Miss Swanson's shoulder and pulled her toward him.

"And maybe you don't look pretty good to me," he said.

"Casey," commanded Francho, "cut that. I promised the girls that everything would be elegant and refined."

"I propose a toast," declared Geraldine, rising. "To our hosts. To their pleasant journey and safe arrival where they wish to go."

FRANCHO lifted his glass and nodded pleasantly.

"That's the spirit," he said enthusiastically. "And no hurry about arriving. I want to tell you ladies that I used to run the swankiest night club in New York. The richest and swellest people were there every night. Lords and dukes that were visiting the country used to be brought there. We had a four dollar cover charge and

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twenty-five bucks a bottle for champagne. Those were the days, eh, Jack?"

"May they come again," said Casey fervently.

"They're over," Francho asserted. "But we got ours. What I want to say is that I never saw better looking, better dressed dames in the club."

"I'd like to believe it. Unfortunately, I can't," murmured Lucy.

"You can. I never saw a doll in New York that was in your class, kid," he assured her.

"Dig into the grub, everybody. Eat hearty and drink fast."

"Kin you imagine?" demanded Casey. "Leon and me are running down on this old tub in the motor boat and he says to me, 'We got to spend a month or so on that thing. I wish I could take chloroform and sleep until it's time to go ashore.'"

"And we come over the side and here is the Ziegfeld Follies," said Francho delightedly. "Miss Stevens, how about a dance?"

"Later, please. I have never been so hungry in my life."

"Mrs. Rollins," demanded Casey, "how come you feed these kids garbage when you got chicken like this hid away?"

Geraldine's face grew red and her eyes narrowed and she glared malignantly at the roughneck.

"Righto!" exclaimed Francho. "It's going to be different from now on, people. We'll serve the canned goods to the whole crew, and when they give out we'll stop a ship and buy the best they've got on board. Don't look so black, Mrs. Rollins. I'll pay the bill."

"I'm afraid the vessels we encounter will refuse to stop. You must remember, Mr. Francho, that our purse is limited and we have a year's cruise ahead of us. We have no refrigerating plant on board. We must have stores which will keep in the tropics."

"I'll buy the refrigerating plant. What the hell!" cried Casey, not to be outdone by his pal and chief. "Everything *de luxe*. That's the way to do business."

He was pouring the contents of a second bottle. Lucy and Geraldine sipped their wine cautiously. Miss Swanson drank freely, and so did both the Ryders, whose eyes were alight with excitement.

"It's a pity that these gentlemen are not accompanying us for the whole cruise," Geraldine said ironically.

"Give me a good time and maybe I'll do that little thing," Casey assured her. "Say, Geraldine, you're not so bad for a big dame."

"How would you like a crack in the jaw?" asked Francho.

But Geraldine smiled cloyingly at Irishman. "I've been told I wasn't bad at all, Mr. Casey," she retorted.

"I WANT you to understand things," Francho continued, but addressing Lucy. "We're landing in a port of Ecuador. We'll have to stay there a year, maybe, before things are fixed up so we can go back to the United States. I'm going to be awfully lonely."

"If you speak Spanish you'll find Spanish ladies; very beautiful ones, I'm told."

"After seeing you they'll look like nothing. We've got weeks ahead of us. I'm hoping, by the time we get there, you might decide I'm a good guy to tie up with."

"I'm afraid I want to see the world before I think of settling down," Lucy told him. "I think you have the makings of a nice person, but it's only fair—"

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"Now, don't say anything. That's an idea, now."

Mr. and Mrs. Ryder had risen and were fox-trotting to the phonograph. Casey immediately grasped Miss Swanson and dragged her out on the floor.

"Why don't you two dance?" demanded Geraldine. "You ought to dance divinely together."

"Shall we?"

"All right," agreed Lucy.

With the first step Lucy realized that she was in the arms of an amazing dancer, a man who combined grace and suppleness with perfect rhythm. She followed faultlessly the complicated steps which he introduced. Lucy loved to dance; she gloried in rhythm and she had rarely met a perfect dancer.

Geraldine changed the record and came and stood with her back against the table at the place where Lucy had been sitting. She was smiling upon them like a benevolent fox. And the eyes of the Stevens girl widened as she observed, when Francho glided with her across the room, a white powder dribbling from the hand which Geraldine held behind her back into Leon Francho's glass of wine.

She was drugging his wine. And Lucy's eyes flamed at the treachery of it. That Francho had driven the woman from her cabin, that he had disarmed and flouted her husband, that he was lord of the ship and that all on board were at his mercy did not matter. The horrible woman was pouring poison into a drinking glass.

Lucy had permitted Francho to lead her; now she exerted a slight pressure to which he yielded and they bore down on Geraldine, who moved around behind the table. And then Lucy did something which she had never done before on a dance floor, she stepped on her partner's foot, stumbled, and piched against the table, put out her hand to save herself and tipped over the glass of wine.

"I'm so sorry," she pleaded.

"Aw, the old boat keeled over. I felt it," Francho said hastily. But Lucy stared fixedly at Geraldine, and the menace she saw in her eyes remained with her during the night.

THWACK! Cynthia Swanson pushed Casey away from her, swung her right arm and slapped him so hard on his left cheek that the print of her five fingers was stamped upon it.

"Aw, gee, what's a little kiss?" he protested. "How do you get that way?"

"And this concludes the evening's entertainment," said Francho gayly. "Good night, everybody. We'll all get together again soon."

"Come on, chief, we're only just getting acquainted," grumbled Casey.

Francho jerked his thumb toward the captain's cabin.

"In!" he snapped.

"But we ain't drunk all the wine," protested Mr. Casey, who moved, nevertheless, in the direction indicated.

The Ryders, who were slightly intoxicated, who had forgotten temporarily their enforced separation, lifted feeble objections. Miss Swanson, head high, looking like an affronted blond goddess, walked into her stateroom and closed the door with a bang.

Francho grinned at Lucy Stevens. "Told you I wouldn't stand for rough stuff," he reminded her. "But it's been a swell evening. You look kind of queer, kid."

"I'm all right," she assured him unconvincingly.

"Humph!" He slipped over behind

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Mrs. Rollins, suddenly grasped her right hand and pulled open her fingers.

"How dare you! Let go, you beast!" she wailed.

Her hand was empty. Lucy, who had observed a square of white paper on the floor at the spot where Geraldine previously had been standing, put her foot on it.

"Where have you got the stuff?" the gangster demanded in a hard but low-pitched voice.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said shrilly. "Let me go."

He gazed speculatively at Miss Stevens.

"That was no accident," he said. "Why did you tip over that glass?"

She met his gaze squarely. "It was an accident," she asserted.

"Will you let Miss Stevens stick her hand inside your dress?" he demanded of Geraldine.

"Certainly not."

"If she doesn't, I will, lady," he assured her grimly.

The eyes of the woman were black coals smouldering. His were like the sharp points of spears. A second passed.

"You are mad, or drunk, or both," she said contemptuously. "Lucy, darling, satisfy the beast."

"You know I don't want to do this," Lucy protested. "I assure you, Mr. Francho—"

"She's going to be searched," he stated gruffly. "She would rather have you do it."

Lucy moved slowly around the table, her face pink with embarrassment and fear. Timidly she thrust her hand inside the tall woman's bodice.

"She is concealing nothing, of course," she declared.

"O.K. Good night, Mrs. Rollins. Suppose you and I take a stroll on the deck, Miss Stevens. It's a grand night outside."

CHAPTER XVII.

TWO WOMEN.

LUCY shook her head. "If you don't mind, I'll turn in," she said. "It has been such an exciting evening.

"My dear, a walk on deck would do you good," declared Geraldine, smiling eagerly. "And I don't know why Mr. Francho was so suspicious, but he has been a nice host and it's frightfully hot in here."

Lucy stared at her, bewildered. Francho's eyes were almost hypnotic. She resisted them.

"Some other night," she said with a pleasant smile. She dropped her handkerchief and stooped quickly to retrieve it before Francho could perform the service. When she straightened up she had handkerchief and the incriminating square of white paper.

"Good night, Mrs. Rollins. Good night, all," she said, and went into her cabin.

"Thanks for a swell time, Mr. Francho," said Ryder. "Let's you and I go out on deck, darling."

Left alone with Geraldine, Francho grasped her roughly by the shoulders.

"Listen, lady," he said gravely. "I'm miles ahead of you all the time. I've been bucking every game they play on the big time. No windbag of a schooner captain can put anything over on me. No slinking, sneaky female bat can get her hooks into me. I'm going ashore at Quento and my dough goes ashore with me. Now go and tell your louse of a husband that nothing's any use."

He released her, strode into his quarters and slammed the door behind him.

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Geraldine's lips were drawn back, her body bent forward at the waist and she lifted her arms and curled her fingers as though she would like to sink her nails in his flesh. In her black silk gown she looked, at the moment, rather like a huge vampire bat.

After a few seconds her fury passed. She looked at herself in the mirror of the buffet, patted her sleek black hair, then crossed the cabin and tapped softly on Lucy Stevens's door.

"It's Geraldine, darling," she cooed. "I'd like to speak to you."

After a slight hesitation Lucy opened the door. She had removed her dress and wore only a pink slip and brassiere.

"Give me that paper, please," Geraldine demanded.

Lucy handed it to her and she thrust it through the open porthole. She then seated herself on the bunk and gazed malevolently at the girl.

"Are you imbecile enough to think that smooth crook will marry you?" she asked.

"If you came here to insult me, you had better go," the girl said with spirit.

"I'm going when I feel like it," retorted Geraldine. "You're down to your last dollar, of course. You know he has money. Probably all you want is a soft living. You don't care whether he marries you or not."

Lucy let down her hair and began to comb it, her shoulder turned eloquently to the older woman.

GERALDINE decided to try another tack.

"I'm sorry if I was rude, darling," she said cloyingly. "I have only your interests at heart. I'm sure your mother would talk to you as I am going to."

"My mother was not the sort of woman who would attempt to poison anybody," Lucy retorted.

"Do you know that these two men are gangsters, gunmen, robbers and murderers?"

"Really? How do such people happen to be on board?" Lucy inquired pointedly.

"My dear, I assure you we had no notion who they were. Captain Rollins was approached and asked if he would take two important business men on board if they came out to the ship. We assumed, of course, that they had some reason for coming on board after we had sailed, but we had no notion that they would turn out to be notorious gangsters. You see, dear, Ray and I have very little money. We want to keep our contract to take you people around the world, and the passage money these scoundrels agreed to pay would give us the funds to make it possible."

"So you really are philanthropists. Our two hundred dollars had nothing to do with the agreement you made with us."

Geraldine lighted a cigarette and smiled benevolently at the young woman.

"It enabled us to stock the ship for a few months. We planned, of course, to pick up freight at various ports, which would enable us to make both ends meet. You see, I am talking very frankly."

"Look here," exclaimed Lucy. "I saw you putting poison in Mr. Francho's glass."

"It wasn't poison, darling. Just a sleeping powder."

"Well, that was a wicked thing to do."

"An extreme measure justified by the situation. Lucy, dear, it was as much in your interest as mine and my

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husband's. Do you know that they have forced us to change our course? You think we are headed for Tahiti. We are bound for a steaming, fever-stricken port in Ecuador called Quento. They can escape extradition there."

Though she was telling Lucy something the girl already knew, she kept silent.

"They have taken charge of the ship; they insult my husband on every occasion, and I am certain that when we arrive at Quento they intend to rob us of the money they paid and what cash we received from you dear people. The best that can happen to us is that we shall be stranded in that awful place; the worst that they cut our throats before we leave the ship."

"You paint a terrible picture," said the girl, perturbed as she well might have been.

"Do you suppose for a second that this man doesn't intend to drag you ashore with him? And his dreadful companion is in love with me. Think of us, forced to live with those beasts in that awful place."

"I—I'm sure you exaggerate," said Lucy faintly.

"I'm telling you the truth, my dear. Something must be done. I dropped the sleeping powder into his wine. It wouldn't harm him. I frequently take it myself. I had already emptied another powder into Mr. Casey's glass. While they were sleeping my husband and the mate and that brave Mr. Baker, who adores you, my dear, would have overpowered them and secured their weapons."

"And then what?" demanded Lucy.

Mrs. Rollins wore the expression of one armed with righteousness.

"We would reduce them to the position of passengers on this ship, not rulers of it. We would keep our contract with them meticulously. We would land them as agreed at Quento and then, with ample funds to continue our cruise, we would sail merrily on our way. My dear, do you realize the enormity of your action?"

LUCY looked contrite. "Not having any idea of your intentions," she said, "I was horrified when I saw you drugging his wine. I—I thought it was a deadly poison. I tried to protect you. I didn't let him know what I had seen."

"But the opportunity was lost. We may never get another," said Geraldine.

Lucy sat down on her camp stool and gazed steadily at the Amazon.

"Maybe you are unnecessarily alarmed," she said. "You are fearful of Mr. Francho's intentions. Well, he is equally afraid of you and Captain Rollins. He told me that he had a large sum of money with him. He suspects you and Captain Rollins of planning to rob him and push him and Mr. Casey overboard. Of course I know you have no such intentions."

Mrs. Rollins clasped her hands. "My dear child!" she cried in tones of horror.

"You suspect them of wishing to drag us into white slavery, of robbing the ship. Don't you see that both of you are wrong? I've talked quite a little with this Francho. He is an unscrupulous man, of course, and he has made his money in an illicit trade which was winked at by most of the people of the United States. He is not thoroughly bad. I'm quite sure he wouldn't cut our throats or rob you of the very small amount of money on board. I am quite sure he wants nothing but a safe passage, for which he has paid liberally."

Geraldine's reply was a grunt.

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"What on earth would he do with this ship after he reached his destination?" continued the girl. "And I'm sure he wouldn't want to be bothered with us."

"You are either a fool or very deep," said Geraldine, rising. "I wouldn't put it by you to think you'd like to help him spend all this money he has told you about. I'm deeply disappointed in you, Lucy. I wanted to enlist you with Mr. Baker and the rest of us in recovering control of our ship. I thought you would see that your interests lie with us."

"I'm quite sure there will be no violence on board unless you start it, Mrs. Rollins," Lucy said tartly. "And I doubt very much whether Mr. Baker would countenance drugging these two men."

"Well," said Geraldine, sighing, "I have no more sleeping powders. I only wanted to avert bloodshed. I do hope you are right and the intentions of these criminals are noble. Good night, my dear."

"Good night," said Lucy.

She locked the door behind the woman and slowly finished her preparations for the night.

Lucy Stevens was neither a fool nor very deep. She was a wholesome young woman who had graduated from high school and then attended art school in San Francisco for two years before her widowed mother died. Mrs. Stevens had lived comfortably upon an insurance annuity, the income of which ceased at her death. She had saved a little and after funeral expenses had been paid Lucy found herself owning six thousand dollars.

She had felt justified in taking a small studio in San Francisco and continuing with her painting. During the first year or two she had sold enough of her attractive water colors to encourage her and had had the thrill of seeing her work appear in several magazines. Then the depression came and one by one her magazines folded up, and people avoided the art stores where her landscapes and charming heads were on exhibition.

She had friends in San Francisco, nice young men in modest circumstances, agreeable girls who were earning their own living and not doing very well at it. Most of them borrowed money from her. The time came when she was down to a few hundred dollars and then she read the seductive advertisement inserted in the classified columns of the San Francisco newspapers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LUCY SEEKS ADVICE.

IT was the mate's watch below, but Claude Cummings wasn't sleepy.

He was sitting on the deck, his back against the side of the forward hatch, his child's eyes gazing over the wide expanse of ocean which had a sheen in the morning sun like burnished copper. He was thinking about the sea. He was wishing he was on a clipper ship with tall masts and square yards. He could see himself as the smartest seaman on board, the first up the rigging and out upon the top gallant yards. Even a hurricane would have no terrors for him, in that case, and no wind would be strong enough to break his grip upon the ropes.

A soft hand on his shoulder broke into his revery. He looked up and colored like a tomato, because Lucy Stevens was darn pretty, and though he had no use for girls, pretty ones always made him feel uncomfortable.

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"I bet I know what you were thinking of," Lucy said roguishly.

"I bet you don't," he retorted, blushing even more crimson.

She climbed on the hatch and swung her pretty legs. Claude stood up reluctantly. She had on skirts to-day, a short white duck skirt and high-heeled slippers. Girls had no business wearing pants, he thought.

"You were thinking that it would be nice to be back home and going to the movies with some little girl you sort of like."

"Is that so! I was thinking that there was nothing interesting on this old tub, that's what I was thinking. I was wishing I was a sailor in the days when there were pirates and square sails and a fellow had to know how to swing a cutlass as well as furl a topsail."

"Nothing interesting on this ship? Am I not interesting?"

"It's like this, Miss Stevens," he said frankly. "Girls are all right, but they hadn't ought to be on a sailing ship. Girls should be in ports and a fellow could call on them when in from a long voyage."

She laughed sweetly. "You are right," she declared. "I wish I was back in a port called San Francisco this very minute. So you don't think there are pirates any more?"

"It stands to reason," he explained. "Long range guns, submarines and airplanes would put them out of business in no time. The world is too darn up to date, that's my opinion."

"Where's Mr. Baker?"

He nodded toward the forecastle. "Taking a snooze, I guess."

"I wonder. I'd like to speak to him. Could you wake him up?"

"Well, I don't know. We're supposed to sleep on our watch below."

"Please go in and ask him to come out, like a nice boy."

"I'm not a nice boy; I'm a man. But I'll see if he wants to come out."

LUCY looked about cautiously while he was gone. Captain Rollins was on the quarter deck. Ryder was at the wheel. Geraldine was in the galley with Miss Swanson. Yates was at the bow. Neither Casey nor Francho had appeared on deck this morning. It looked like an opportunity.

In about five minutes Baker appeared. He had courtplaster over each eye and a swollen nose and bruises and scratches on his face, but he did look wholesome. He was very red and fully conscious of his battered appearance.

"Claude said you wanted to see me," he began, much embarrassed. "I want to thank you for stepping into that brawl, Miss Stevens. I reckon you saved me a worse beating than I received."

"Please let's not talk about that," she pleaded. "We may be interrupted. I want to ask you about things that are worrying me frightfully."

He smiled eagerly. "Why, sure. What, Miss Stevens?"

"What do you make of the situation on this ship, please?"

"It's a very ugly situation, to be frank."

"Something happened last night—"

"When you were dancing with that gunman?" he asked roughly.

"He's a marvelous dancer," she retorted. "Let's not quarrel. Those men in the captain's cabin think that Captain Rollins and his wife and the mate intend to rob them. Have they any reason for such an opinion?"

"Are you going to report to Francho what I say?" he asked even more rudely.

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She made a pitiful gesture. "You're the only person I can turn to and you're unkind," she complained. "Certainly I'm not going to repeat anything you tell me."

"These two yeggs have grabbed all the weapons on board. Naturally Captain Rollins hopes to resume command of his ship."

"But does he intend to rob them?"

He hesitated. "I think it very likely," he said honestly. "It looks like a chance to clean up to the Rollinses and Holdenburg."

"Are you in this plot with them?" she demanded anxiously.

"They think I am."

"Then you're not?"

"I'm not a thief. Look here, Lu—Miss Stevens—"

She smiled divinely. "You can call me Lucy, Tom."

He drew a deep breath. "Gosh!" he exclaimed. "That makes me feel good. The way I look at it is this. We know Francho and Casey are gangsters, gunmen, cold-blooded killers. I've seen Francho looking at you. He's handsome and girls fall for handsome men, but he doesn't mean you any good."

"I can take care of myself," she said.

"At home, yes. We're out on the Pacific, where there are no laws. A man takes what he wants; kills to get it. Holdenburg, or Maitland, is a murderer, but not a professional murderer. Rollins and his wife are crooks of the first water. In my opinion it will be worse for us with Francho running things than the other outfit. A choice of two evils."

SHE shuddered. "I differ with you. All that Francho and Casey want is to be landed safely at some place called Quento. They have nothing against the rest of us. They won't molest us. They have taken the firearms to defend themselves. If we reach Quento safely, they will go ashore with their luggage and we'll be rid of them."

"How about dragging you ashore with them?" he demanded.

"It's a city. There are police. I don't think they would dare. You see, they can't afford to attract attention to themselves. So all you have to do is to keep the captain from attacking them—they'll shoot to kill, I am sure."

"So am I," he said ruefully. "Trouble is, we're not going to Quento. We're headed in a different direction."

"But what's going to happen?" she gasped.

"Hell will pop. What's killing me is that it will happen on this little bit of a ship and you're in the middle of it, and so are the other women. I don't know what to do."

"Make them go back on the Quento course."

"They won't. I can't force them. If Francho finds out, he'll kill Rollins or Holdenburg or both."

"What are they going to do if they capture these men?"

"Put them ashore on an uninhabited island for which we are headed." Even as he told her what Rollins had told him he knew that it could not be the captain's real intention. Francho and Casey would be knocked on the head and thrown overboard.

And, to conceal that crime, they would have to do something about the seven honest people on board. Murder them, too, in all probability.

"Let me tell you what happened at the party last night," she said eagerly. "What do you think?" she demanded when she had finished.

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Tom pushed back an unruly lock which fell over his right eye.

"It would have brought things to a head," he said thoughtfully. "You did some quick thinking. If you hadn't knocked that glass of wine over, we'd be out of the frying pan and into the fire. What we have to do is to preserve the *status quo*, if you know what I mean. At present we're helpless, but I'll talk to Cummings. He's young but husky. I can depend on him. Yates and Ryder I wouldn't trust."

"But something is bound to break eventually."

"We have to gain time. I have to work out some plan. Listen, I was tipped to gain you over and induce you to take Francho walking on deck on a dark night—"

"Why—why—" she exclaimed, "he asked me last night to go walking with him after the party. Now I remember. Geraldine, who had been furious, suddenly beamed and urged me to go with him. She said it would do us both good. What did she mean?"

"One of us, Rollins or Holdenburg or myself would have crept up behind him and slugged him. Then we would have taken his gun away from him and gone after Casey. By that time Casey would be out from the drug and they would have the ship. I'm certainly glad you wouldn't go out on deck with him."

"But what's to be done?" It was a wail of alarm.

"Somehow, in some way, Cummings and I have got to lick both these gangs and take command of the ship. Then we'll head for a Mexican port and turn the whole outfit over to the authorities."

"How are you going to do this?"

"You may search me. All I know is that it's the only way out."

"You're such a comfort," she said with a sigh.

"And you're such a darling," he answered tenderly. "Rollins is watching us with an eye like a hawk. You better run along now and I'll go back to my bunk. They'll want a report of our conversation. I'll tell them I sounded you out but you think Francho is a good egg so, naturally, I couldn't tell you what we have in mind. I hope I haven't scared you too much."

"I am scared," she said honestly, "but I'll carry on."

"No burst of confidence to Francho. No warning of any sort. It would be fatal."

"Not a word—and thank you. I—I have confidence in you, Tom."

"I certainly appreciate that. I'll try to make good for you."

"For us," she corrected. Her eyes were eloquent.

Baker went back to his berth and twisted and turned in it. He could think of no plan.

CHAPTER XIX.

GOOD POINTS OF A GANGSTER.

WHEN his four hours below were over he rolled out with the mate, who had slept soundly since turning in. Cummings was in earnest conversation with Yates about the poor quality of food which came out of the schooner's galley.

The mate sent Tom to the wheel and proceeded to initiate Cummings into the mysteries of the donkey engine, the rattle and rumble of which sounded terrifically loud and objectionable on the calm, silent ocean.

About fifteen minutes after Baker took the wheel Francho, wearing a white Palm Beach suit, came up

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through the cabin scuttle. He nodded to Baker, hesitated, and approached him.

"You look pretty well bunged up," he said, grinning broadly. "How do you feel?"

"All right," Tom answered curtly.

"Say, you put up a swell scrap, kid. If I hadn't been a pug in my time you'd have knocked my block off."

Baker's gorge was rising. He didn't answer.

"You're a heavyweight. I'm a middleweight," went on Francho. "I had to keep away from you and box. I couldn't mix it. The one punch you landed knocked me down."

Tom softened a little. He liked to remember that. "I was out of my class," he admitted.

"I've been sorry about the ring," continued Francho, smiling cajolingly. "You sailed right into me and I forgot it."

"Yeah?" queried Baker ironically.

"That's right. What would you have done to me if I stopped to pull it off?"

"Knocked you out, probably."

"Sure you would," Francho assured him. "With a little training, you'd be a good heavyweight. How much do you weigh?"

"A hundred and seventy-eight."

"You don't know how to block, and your footwork is bad," said Francho earnestly. "Say, this is going to be a long trip. How about you and me taking a nice friendly workout every morning. I'll make a good scrapper out of you."

"Thanks. I've duties to perform. I have no ambition to be a scrapper."

The gangster laughed good-naturedly. "It would have helped you a lot if you knew what to do about a left jab, kid. Another thing, I ain't ashamed to say I was wrong. I'm sorry I came up and told you to scram in front of Lucy. In your place I'd have swung at Max Baer. Will you shake?"

Tom took his right hand from the spoke of the wheel and accepted the fellow's hand. The man had plenty of charm when he wanted to use it. And he didn't have to apologize to a chap whom he must look upon as a common sailor.

"That's the stuff," declared Francho. "Miss Stevens says you're a right guy. I guess you're the only right guy in this outfit. Rollins would stick a knife in your back. This mate is a gorilla if I ever saw one, and Geraldine—what a dame, what a dame! Lemme look at the compass, will you?"

"Certainly."

Francho gazed uncomprehendingly at the instrument. "Mystery to me," he confessed. "How we heading?"

"In a southerly direction."

"Well, that's right. We're going to South America."

Baker wisely made no answer.

Francho laid his hand familiarly upon the shoulder of his late antagonist.

"I'm in a spot, friend," he said. "Navigation is out of my line. These people have to take me to a certain place. If Rollins double crosses me I'll blow his head off. How would you like to make a thousand bucks?"

"I could use them."

"You know what's going on. Tip me."

"I'm a member of the crew," Tom reminded him. "You will have to get your information from Captain Rollins."

Francho stiffened. "O.K.," he said shortly. "You're sure we're headed south?"

"Positive."

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"Well, he'd better keep going south."

He went over and seated himself in the captain's chair. Tom suppressed a smile.

IT was obvious that Francho was a self-educated man whose knowledge of geography was sketchy. He thought South America was south of North America.

If one sailed due south of California when the ship arrived in the latitudes of South America it's west coast would be almost as far to the east as New York is from France.

Almost the whole continent of South America is east of New York, three thousand miles east of California. And the east coast of South America is almost as far east of New York as Europe. The Panama Canal, where South America begins, is due south of the Atlantic seaboard of North America.

Francho was not alone in his error. A very large percentage of high school graduates in the United States have the same delusion. Rollins had counted on that when he dared to change his course.

But the gangster was out of his chair and returning to the man at the wheel.

"I want to talk to you, Baker," he said gravely. "First, I'm going to tell you who I am. Leon Francho. I was in the hooch game in New York. I used to run in my own stuff and sell it in my own night clubs and speaks. I never sold bum liquor. I charged fair prices. I made a barrel of money. Well, the government got after me and they repealed the Eighteenth Amendment. They claim I knocked off some guys, but they couldn't prove it, so they went after me on income tax.

"I took it on the lam. That's why I'm here. I've burned up a few double crossing so and so's and I'm not ashamed of it, but I never harmed a right guy and I ain't going to. The reason I was dirty to you was it made me wild to see you talking to Lucy."

Tom's face flamed.

"I'm not interested in your reason," he growled.

"Don't get me wrong, feller. I give a dame all the respect she deserves. Maybe you think I'm not on the level with Lucy. Well, I'm going to marry her. I'm taking her ashore with me in Quento."

"Like hell you are," said Baker. "Maybe she'll have something to say about that."

"You're stuck on her, eh?" Francho remarked softly.

"Look here, I'm not discussing her. Leave her out of this conversation."

"Suppose I don't take her with me. What's going to become of you poor saps? Do you suppose for a minute this skunk of a Rollins is going to cart you around the world? Do you want that girl dumped in some island port where she'd have to go on the town?"

"Why damn you— If I could let go this wheel—"

"I've got all the money there is. In a few months I'll take Lucy to New York. She'll live like a queen, bo. What have you got to offer?"

"I'm not a gunman, a gangster and a murderer," cried Tom, beside himself with rage.

"No, you're a bum, that's what you are. In a few weeks you'll be a beachcomber. You don't worry me at all, feller. Talk to her all you like. Pan me, if you think it'll do you any good. Lucy will go ashore with me at Quento."

"If you ever get there," said Baker between clenched teeth.

Francho drew back. His face length-

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ened, his jaw set and his black eyes glittered.

"So I'm not going to get there," he said very low. "And you're in it, too. Well, I'll be watching you."

He turned away. Tom swallowed hard. "Wait a minute, Francho," he called.

Francho turned back. "Well?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE CAPTAIN STRIKES.

"YOU claim to be on the level," Tom said earnestly. "Give me your word that Lucy can do as she pleases, and I'll do my best to see that you arrive where you want to go."

Francho gazed at him thoughtfully.

"You have the wrong idea about dames, Baker," he said. "If they go for a man they don't give a hoot about what he is or what he has done. They don't care if he's killed his man or robbed a bank. They don't say, 'Is this a noble guy who goes to church regular?' They say, 'I like his nose, or the way his hair curls.' If they don't like him, he could be President of the United States and the hell with him. I'm talking about real women, not gold diggers. Lucy is real. I could tell that right away. I'm not knocking any woman on the head. There are too many. I'm taking her with me because she wants to go. If she don't, I'll go ashore alone."

"You mean that?"

"You bet your life."

"O.K.," replied Baker. "I reckon there are worse people than gangsters. And some of them are on this ship."

"You and me understand each other," said Francho. "And hand it to me for pulling out their teeth."

Francho grinned understandingly and returned to his chair. The two deck chairs were placed against the cabin skylight on the starboard side. The skylight was arched and was about four feet long by three feet wide. The main room cleared the peak of the skylight by a couple of feet. As Francho dropped in his chair, Tom glanced at the compass and observed that he had let the ship fall off a couple of points. He swung her back on her course and, glancing forward, he saw a rope drop from the boom directly over Francho's head and its loop encircle the neck of the gangster.

It grew taut instantly, lifted Francho from his chair and into the air. And, as he rose, the mate was swinging down from the boom where he had been standing, concealed from the helmsman and Francho by the huge sail. He landed with a thump on deck beyond the skylight, clutching firmly the rope which was hanging the passenger.

Taking advantage of Francho's conversation with the man at the wheel, the mate had utilized a block and tackle as a gallows.

As Francho went up the top of his head struck the heavy boom. His hands, which instinctively had clutched at the rope strangling him, dropped and he lost consciousness.

Rollins, who had been lurking on the deck below, tore up the ladder and pounced upon his enemy.

"He's out. Lower away," he shouted. Holdenburg let go the line and the captain lowered Francho to the deck, after which he went methodically through the pockets of the prisoner. From a shoulder holster he drew a large automatic and from a hip pocket a thirty-eight caliber revolver which, until recently, had been Rollins's property. He stuffed the man's wallet

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and several letters in his own breast pocket. Meanwhile, Holdenburg had produced a rope and was binding the victim hand and foot.

During the few seconds which it had taken to dispose of Leon Francho, Baker resisted an almost uncontrollable impulse to take a hand in the affair, and not upon the side of captain and mate. Had he been free, he could not have restrained himself, but figuratively speaking he was chained to the wheel. Now Rollins approached him, exuding satisfaction, triumph and good will.

"Neat, eh?" he demanded. "My idea, Tom. You helped by holding his attention."

Francho's eyes opened and, with the noose removed from his neck, he found his voice. For fully a minute he expressed his opinion of skipper and mate in eloquent language.

"Shut up, damn you!" roared Holdenburg, who drew back his boot and kicked him viciously in the ribs.

"Oh, let him talk," Captain Rollins said scornfully. "Neatly done, Mr. Mate. Mr. Francho, I regret the necessity for this. Your own high-handed conduct is responsible for it."

"You double crossing, white livered, mealy mouthed rat!" bellowed Francho. "And you, Baker, you treacherous—"

"Have you something you can use as a gag, Mr. Mate?" demanded the skipper. "After all, we have ladies on board."

In a trice Holdenburg had a gag securely fastened in the gangster's mouth and his stream of vituperation ceased.

Tom steered the ship, white and frightened. What he had feared had happened. While they had captured Francho, there was Casey to be reckoned with. There would be fighting, shooting. Lucy might be hurt.

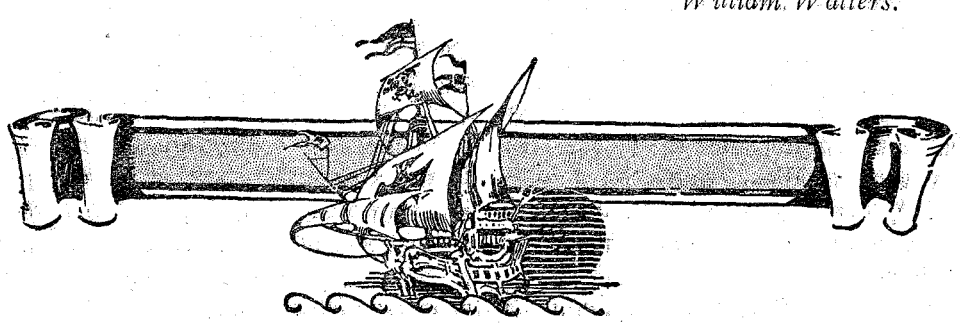
TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The Upside-Down Tree

ONE of the queer species of the vegetable kingdom is the alpatico tree of Patagonia. This shrub was practically unknown until discovered recently by a firm of South American contractors, who were obliged to extend their road-building operations through a veritable forest of them.

The tree, it is said, grows entirely beneath the surface, the only indication of its presence being a hump in the soil. However, by digging, the trunk is soon uncovered, also a dense mass of roots, growing out and down in all directions.

William Walters.



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STRANGER *than* FICTION

By JOHN S. STUART

WHOLESALE RUSTLING

CATTLE rustling in Africa is on as big a scale as the continent itself! Raiders of the Galubba tribe swooped across the frontier of Kenya, not long ago, and stole more than 7,000 head of cattle. They also massacred 120 natives.

POLISH GALLANT

A MAN in Poland forgot to go through the little formality of divorce—not once, but four times. And now he can't marry any more. His fifth wife became suspicious of him, succeeded in finding her four predecessors, and then the wife and the ex-wives became friends. The husband was invited to a party where they were all gathered. The women became blind with rage, kicked him and actually beat him to death!

BABYLON'S RADIO CENTER

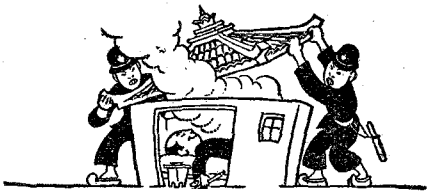
NEW YORK looked down on the gardens of Radio City with no little surprise. To take valuable space in the very center of a great modern city was amazing. But few New Yorkers realized that Radio Center had been patterned after the ancient city of Babylon. The plan of this Bible city was rectangular; all its streets were straight; and around the squares which were formed by these straight streets the private houses were built, with gardens in the middle. Individual houses were detached, and of three or four stories in height. And some of the city walls were as much as seventy feet high.

WITH A DEAD MAN'S EYES

A WOMAN in Moscow can see today because of a dead man. For eleven years she was blind in both eyes, then she went to Odessa, where an operation was performed. The cornea of the eye is the transparent part of the coat of the eyeball which covers the iris and pupil and admits light into the interior. The corneas from both eyes of a corpse were grafted onto her own eyes. Columbia University is the only place in the United States where this operation has been performed successfully; the process is one which has been discovered during the last two or three years.

BY FAST MAIL

KIT CARSON is credited with piloting the first overland mail from the Pacific to the Atlantic. The first Pony Express left Los Angeles on April 17th, 1848, for Washington, D. C. In our own day of instantaneous radio communication, it is hard to realize that the Eastern newspapers had no word of Carson's achievement until August.



SMOKED OUT OF HOME

THE authorities of Canton, China, are determined to stamp out—or ought one to say smoke out?—opium addicts. An official proclamation threatens dire punishment for those found guilty. If the people are caught smoking opium in their own homes, the police will come immediately and unroof their houses.

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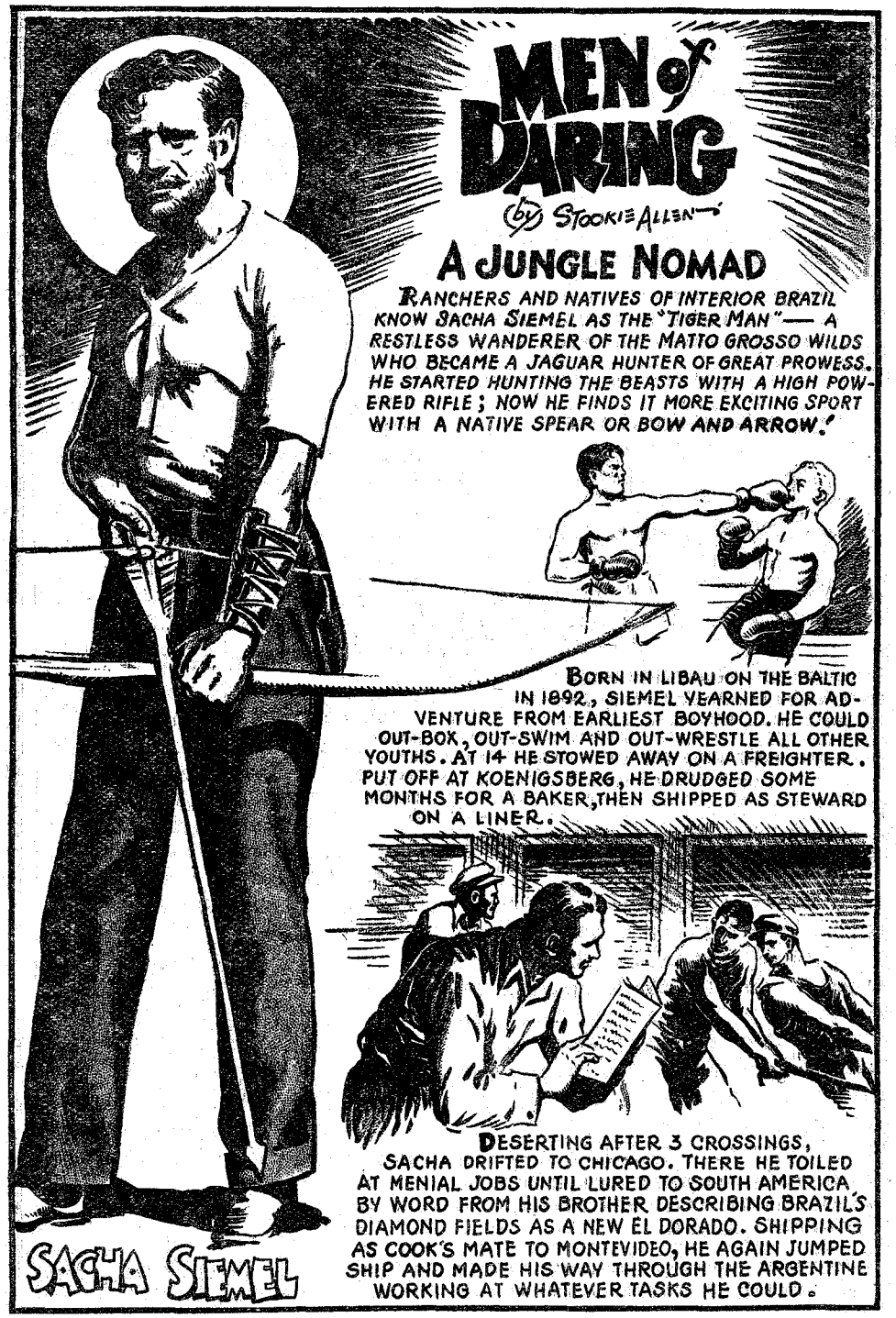
MEN of DARING
by Stookie Allen
A JUNGLE NOMAD
RANCHERS AND NATIVES OF INTERIOR BRAZIL KNOW SACHA SIEMEL AS THE "TIGER MAN" — A RESTLESS WANDERER OF THE MATTO GROSSO WILDS WHO BECAME A JAGUAR HUNTER OF GREAT PROWESS. HE STARTED HUNTING THE BEASTS WITH A HIGH POWERED RIFLE; NOW HE FINDS IT MORE EXCITING SPORT WITH A NATIVE SPEAR OR BOW AND ARROW!
BORN IN LIBAU ON THE BALTIC IN 1892, SIEMEL YEARNED FOR ADVENTURE FROM EARLIEST BOYHOOD. HE COULD OUT-BOX, OUT-SWIM AND OUT-WRESTLE ALL OTHER YOUTHS. AT 14 HE STOWED AWAY ON A FREIGHTER. PUT OFF AT KOENIGSBERG, HE DRUDGED SOME MONTHS FOR A BAKER, THEN SHIPPED AS STEWARD ON A LINER.
DESERTING AFTER 3 CROSSINGS, SACHA DRIFTED TO CHICAGO. THERE HE TOILED AT MENIAL JOBS UNTIL LURED TO SOUTH AMERICA BY WORD FROM HIS BROTHER DESCRIBING BRAZIL'S DIAMOND FIELDS AS A NEW EL DORADO. SHIPPING AS COOK'S MATE TO MONTEVIDEO, HE AGAIN JUMPED SHIP AND MADE HIS WAY THROUGH THE ARGENTINE WORKING AT WHATEVER TASKS HE COULD.
SACHA SIEMEL

A true story in pictures every week

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IN BUENOS AIRES HE LEARNED THE TRADE OF MECHANIC. THEN HE FLED FROM A HOPELESS LOVE AFFAIR FOR THE JUNGLE WILDS. AT PASSO FUNDO, EN ROUTE, HE TOOK A FALL OUT OF A BOASTFUL PARAGUAYAN STRONGMAN IN A SPECIAL WRESTLING MATCH. HE MADE HIS WAY INTO THE MATTO GROSSO COUNTRY AS A MECHANIC AND PHOTOGRAPHER. MEANWHILE HE ROAMED THE JUNGLE, JAGUAR HUNTING.
SACHA'S FIRST BRUSH WITH "TIGRERO"—THE NATIVES' NAME FOR THE JAGUAR—WAS WHEN SEVERAL GAUCHO STALKERS HAD A BIG CAT TREED IN A THICKET. HE IMPLORED THEM TO HOLD THEIR FIRE SO HE COULD SNAP AN ACTION PICTURE. PRODDING THE BEAST WITH A LONG STICK, SIEMEL RISKED A CLAWING AND GOT THE POSE HE WANTED. THEN, BACKING AWAY, HE GOT THE SNARLING JAGUAR WITH A BULLET TO THE HEART.
AN INDIAN TAUGHT SACHA HOW TO KILL "TIGRERO" WITH A SPEAR. THE TRICK IS TO STAND FIRMLY IN THE PATH OF THE CHARGING ANIMAL AND GET HIM TO IMPALE HIMSELF ON THE SPEAR'S POINT. NO JAGUAR EVER INJURED SACHA, BUT ONCE WHILE HE WAS FOLLOWING ONE THROUGH SWAMPS, AN ALLIGATOR CAUGHT HIS LEG, CAUSING AN ALL BUT FATAL INJURY.
ONCE SACHA, ATTACKED BY A NOTED SHOOTER-IN-THE-BACK, LEAPT ON THE MAN'S ARM AND DEFLECTED HIS FIRE. BUT HE SPARED THE CRAVEN'S LIFE AFTER ADMONISHING HIM. SACHA'S RECORD OF JAGUARS KILLED IS 119. HIS BUSINESS NOW IS BAGGING "TIGRERO" FOR THE SKINS, FOR MUSEUMS, AND TO STOP THEIR DEPREDATIONS ON RANCHMENS CATTLE. BECAUSE OF HIS JUNGLE EXPERIENCES, EXPLORERS SEEK SACHA'S AID AND COUNSEL.

Next Week: Capt. Meriwether Lewis, Explorer of the Northwest

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"We're from the bureau. We want you, Kenny"

The Fatal Alarm

By KARL DETZER

Author of "Alarm," "The Great White Hat," etc.

Fireman John Kenny of Chicago, in a jam and facing disgrace, finds an unexpected ally

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JOHN KENNY joined the Chicago fire department under two handicaps. The first was the enmity of Packy O'Ryan, crooked political boss of the district known as "back of the Yards," the area behind the stockyards. Second was the friendship of Joe Murillo, O'Ryan's enemy, but not much better a character than O'Ryan. Murillo, posing as a proponent of good government, had helped Kenny get his job, but he expected favors in return. Kenny saw no reason why he should grant them, even if he could.

The young recruit was assigned to Engine 98, where Captain Hannon was in charge, and a feud sprang up between him and Senior Pipeman Degitz when Kenny rescued Degitz from a burning building and Degitz refused to admit it.

Matters were not helped any when, at a tenement fire, Kenny carried a woman down two flights of stairs, only to fall and drop her. Degitz picked her up and left Kenny to his fate.

Kenny managed to get out, only to find that Degitz claimed all the credit for the rescue and denied having seen Kenny. When Kenny forced a showdown, Captain Hannon suspended him and ordered him to appear, with Degitz, in the chief's office for a hearing. At

This story began in the Argosy for April 7.

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the hearing Kenny was surprised to find a lawyer there to represent him. The lawyer said that Joe Murillo had sent him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SURPRISE WITNESS.

MIKE GENNARO and his wife stood for a moment uncertainly inside the door, then came forward at the lawyer's heels toward the desk. Gennaro did not take off his hat, but he nodded politely to the chief.

"Mrs. Gennaro," the lawyer began, "you were caught in a fire yesterday and near burned up; isn't that right?"

The woman nodded; and he went on: "And some fireman come in and pulled you out of it and carried you down the stairs. Last night you told Mr. Joe Murillo about it. Now I want you to tell these gentlemen the same thing you told him."

"I got pulled out, yes," the woman began; but the chief stopped her. He offered her the big leather chair at the end of his desk, where she must face the light, so that he could watch her more closely. He was frowning as he swung around and peered intently at her.

"Start from the beginning, Mrs.—What's the name?—Gennaro. Where were you, and how were you rescued? Tell me all about it. And mind you, madam, we must have the truth. I have ways of knowing whether a thing is true or not. You may proceed now."

The woman sat very straight, her hands in heavy brown knit gloves folded in her lap.

"I am caught in the kitchen of my house when the fire starts," she began. "My man yells for me to get outside quick, and he starts out the door and I follow. He goes down the stair...it is very much smoke, and I can hear the fire below, and many people calling for everybody to run. Then I remember the money. Seventeen dollars. It is behind the picture of the Blessed Virgin on the wall of the kitchen. I run back to get it and put it in my stocking...see...that way."

The chief grunted: "Yes, yes. I see. Proceed, madam. Your husband had gone on ahead, you say. What happened next?"

"Then I remember the shawl my mother gives me from the Old Country, and I go and put it on my shoulder, and then again I start to the stair. I open the door from the kitchen to the hall. But I cannot go out, the smoke it is so fearful now.

"It jumps in at me—*pfff!*—so, like that. I slam the door shut, and I think then maybe I can go to the window and get out that way, in the air shaft. But the shaft is full of fire now. Fire and smoke. Very hot. I hear it breaking the windows down below. So what must I do? I holler. I keep on hollering. Very loud. Then this man comes in—"

"What man?" the chief asked.

"This fireman. By the name of Degitz. He comes in—"

Senior Pipeman Degitz laughed, Hannon cleared his throat, and the lawyer cried:

"Oh, wait, now! Would you know him again if you saw him, this man Degitz?"

"Surest thing," the woman nodded. "He is standing there. The young fellow." She pointed to John Kenny. "He picks me up, and I—"

"Wait a minute!" Degitz glowered

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and swung angrily upon the woman. "How do you get that way?"

THE lawyer was smiling again, showing all his bad teeth. He straightened his red cravat once more and spoke to Mike Gennaro's wife.

"What made you think his name was Degitz, missus?"

"It is in the paper. My man he reads it to me. So I say I must light a candle for him the next morning in the church."

"There you are, sir," the lawyer exclaimed. "Read the name in the paper, but points out the right man! Last night when Joe Murillo goes to their house, she tells him about it, and describes this young fellow Kenny. And Murillo sees Kenny on the street, and hears somewhere how he is let out of the company for telling the truth instead of letting Degitz grab off all the credit.

"Murillo don't like Degitz. Don't like the company he keeps. And Joe has ways of hearing things, chief. And he reads in the paper how Degitz claims the credit. So he sends me down here to see that Kenny gets justice. Kenny don't mean a thing to Joe. Just comes from back of the Yards. Understand that. All Joe's interested in is good government. Go on now, missus, and tell the rest of your story."

But Degitz interrupted, claiming that Murillo was trying to frame him, and charging that Kenny had planned this scene with the Gennaro couple and the lawyer. Hannon objected: "It's all wrong! I'll not have men on my company that pull this sort of thing. It's a howlin' disgrace, it is! I'll not have either one of you on Engine 98 for ten more minutes."

When at length the chief had quieted the others, the woman continued: "This young fellow took me downstairs, this way, carrying me," she explained. "I couldn't see. Couldn't hardly think, the smoke it is so fearful. Hot. Hot as hell, mister. Can't breathe. When we get near the bottom I hear men there. Then this young fellow falls, and I drop off his shoulder, this way, and somebody picks me up and leaves the young fellow there. When I get outside I see who it is that picks me up. It is that man there." She pointed at Degitz.

"I guess that's all there is to it, chief," the lawyer said. "Bears out exactly what I'm trying to prove. Kenny don't need any lawyer now. Don't need anything except to go back to work. That's what Joe Murillo wanted, fair and square. Friendly and fair and square, that's Joe all over!"

He picked up his briefcase, put on his hat, and tramped out of the door. The chief watched him go, then turned to the Gennaros.

"I may want to talk to you later," he told them. "Leave your name and address with the clerk in the outer office. There's nothing else now, and you can go. Thank you for coming in."

When the couple had departed, Degitz, Hannon and Kenny stood opposite the chief of department and waited. The chief drummed his desk with his fingers, shuffled the letters on the green blotter, then looked up.

"You stick to your story, Degitz?" he asked. "You will be willing to swear to a board of marshals that you went up and got this woman, brought her down, took her outdoors, and didn't see Kenny anywhere on the way? That you didn't purposely leave him there on a stairway to burn?"

"It's the truth, sir," Degitz replied stubbornly. "Of course I'll stick to it.

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He can bring in all Murillo's hoods, and all their molls if he wants, and it'll not prove anything. Only, as senior pipeman, I'm going to put charges against Kenny, if it's my last act."

"And you stick to your story, too, Kenny?" the chief demanded. "In all particulars?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. I'll take the matter under advisement. You both are relieved from duty till further notice. I'll decide by to-morrow what action to take. Meantime, Captain Hannon, I'll send you a substitute or two to fill in the gaps in your outfit. You men may go. Captain, remain here, please."

KENNY reached the door first, opened it and stepped out. The office was full of firemen, policemen and civilians, awaiting a chance to speak to the chief of department. They eyed Kenny and Degitz thoughtfully, glanced at the door as it closed behind them, then settled back in the lumpy attitudes of men who have waited a long time on hard benches. Kenny started toward the corridor, but Degitz caught up with him.

"You'll keep your neck clean, Kenny," the big pipeman warned. "Clean and careful—"

Kenny swung on him. The anger that had bubbled in him all morning, like pitch in a kettle, suddenly overflowed in a burst of flame. Without knowing it, he lifted his voice. There was a shrill note in it, a note of menace. Every one in twenty paces must have heard his warning.

"I'll get you, Degitz! You dirty hoodlum, I'll get you if it takes all winter!"

The senior pipeman shrugged. Kenny saw that half a dozen men were staring at him, and a clerk with a handful of papers had stopped to listen. Degitz grinned insolently, but did not reply. Instead, he walked on into the corridor and disappeared around a corner. After a moment Kenny followed.

The snow was falling faster when he reached the street and once more traffic was tied in knots. Kenny decided to walk, rather than try to crowd into a surface car. On his way to his new northside rooming house he passed the building on Chicago Avenue where yesterday's troubles all started. He did not pause this time, but continued on home, wading the deepening snow.

He was in his room at four o'clock that afternoon when old Jeremiah Priestley, the odd-shift chief of Engine 98's north side battalion, rapped on the door.

"Word from headquarters, Kenny," he said. "Chief of department reinstates you. Sent me to tell you. You go to work to-morrow as usual. Report to Captain Hannon at Engine 98, and your orders will be waiting for you there. You're transferred. . . you'll find where in the morning."

Kenny asked, "What about Degitz?"

The battalion chief grunted, "Mind your own affairs, young 'un. When I was a ree-cruit, I done what my senior pipeman told me and let it go at that. I don't know about Degitz, and what's more I don't care."

Kenny spent the evening in his room. He was reinstated; there was that much for which to be thankful. But Degitz *was* his business, very decidedly his business, in spite of what Battalion Chief Priestley said. Degitz had warned him, with that underworld gesture of the finger drawn across the throat! Degitz was in league with Packy O'Ryan, who was Kenny's enemy. Degitz it was who twice, for

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no apparent reason, had left Kenny to shift for himself in fire!

On the other hand, why was Joe Murillo showing this new interest in the Kenny affairs? Where had he heard that Hannon had taken his badge? And why had he sent a lawyer to the chief's office? Certainly it was out of no love for Kenny. But for the moment he could leave Murillo out of his conjectures. Degitz was his immediate concern.

At least, it was unlikely that Degitz and he would be assigned to the same outfit to-morrow. Hannon had said he wouldn't have either of them longer on Engine 98. Degitz would go to one company, most probably; Kenny to another. But would Degitz be willing to let him alone, even then?

Kenny went to bed early, after sticking his nose out of doors to find that the snow once more had stopped. But he had not fallen to sleep when he heard the doorbell ring, and then a rap at his own room.

HE did not at once open the door; neither did he turn on his light. Instead he rolled silently out of bed, and stepping out of direct line with the door, demanded cautiously: "Who's there and what do you want?"

"Listen, Kenny! This is Ahearn. Ahearn and Blumenthal, from 98. Let us in, quick. Open the door!"

Kenny snapped back the bolt and turned on the light. He drew a blanket around him as the men tramped in. Their faces were grim. Blumenthal looked paler than usual, and he coughed twice before he spoke.

"Heard about Degitz?" he demanded then.

Kenny saw that both men were staring intently at his face, as if they were trying to read his thoughts.

"What about him?"

"He's dead," Ahearn blurted. "Police found his body about two hours ago. Back of our quarters."

"Quarters?" Kenny repeated.

"Back of Engine 98. East of the house, in that vacant lot. He was thrown out in the snow. Yes, shot through the head. He'd been taken for a ride."

Kenny dropped back limply on the bed and looked from one to the other of them.

There was an awkward pause.

"Thought you'd want to know about it," Blumenthal said. "You and him being—well, not friendly..."

"What do you mean?" Kenny flared up. "You think I—"

"Keep your hair on," Blumenthal warned, and coughed again. "We're your friends. Why'd we come if we weren't? It isn't what *we* think that's important. It's what the police are going to do. You'll be hearing from them. Papers will be out with the story any time now. There'll be trouble."

The two men remained an hour, and before they left, Captain Hannon joined them there. The captain looked ten years older than he had that morning. He greeted Kenny with a nod and the question: "Where were you all evening?"

"Here," Kenny answered. The question angered him, but he held his temper and his tongue. "Went to bed early."

"Anybody see you? Anybody here can swear you didn't go out to-night?" The captain saw Kenny's expression, and quickly added: "Not that I'm accusing you. But the police will. They got me already and asked me all about you. Claim you made some remark to Degitz, just this morning, down in city hall. What was that remark, Kenny?"

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"Told him I'd get him, sir," Kenny replied.

His tone was blunt. He stared at the three of them.

The captain muttered: "You put your foot in it again, no doubt about that. Was anybody here in this house who could swear you didn't go out to-night?"

"No, sir. I haven't seen any one."

Hannon shook his head.

"I tried to say a word for you," he disclosed. "Told 'em you was just a mouthy kid. Didn't mean what you said. But they got the dope you're mixed up with Murillo, and that don't look good to 'em. They may take you down town for questioning. If they do, Kenny, tell 'em the truth and nothing but. It'll pay in the long run."

"Yes, sir," Kenny promised. He added: "What about to-morrow? Chief Priestley said I was to report to you."

"And I'm to tell you to go down to Engine 13 and report there," Hannon said. "Don't need to come back to 98, except for your uniform. Report to Lieutenant Mike Brady, ready to go to work. Only, if the police—" he broke off ominously.

Shortly afterward he left; Blumenthal and Ahearn followed him immediately. When they had gone Kenny dressed, went out and bought a newspaper, and returned to his room to wait for the police.

CHAPTER XV.

FOR MURDER.

NO officers visited him that night, however. When he had read the report on the finding of Degitz's body, Kenny turned out his light again. But he did not sleep.

The papers claimed that Degitz had been murdered as the result of a gang war. He had been mixed up in politics, rackets and gangland, the papers stated, and had "incurred the enmity of a powerful political faction." Kenny guessed what faction that was. If any gangster-politician had decreed Degitz's passing, it was easy to surmise which one.

Joe Murillo just this morning had sent a lawyer to defend Kenny at the fire department headquarters. To defend Kenny, or to confound Degitz? Probably the latter. At any rate, Kenny decided, he would discover for himself.

Meantime, how could he prove where he had been all the long evening? No one had seen him in his room; no one could swear that he had not gone out.

The morning broke colder, with a stiff wind and snow squalls off the lake. At seven o'clock Kenny waded drifts to the quarters of 98, and went at once to his locker in the bunk room. He saw the eyes of the men on the odd-numbered shift following him; he knew what they were wondering. How much could he tell, if he wished, about the death of Senior Pipeman Degitz?

He got into his uniform, cleared out his locker, and at eight o'clock reported for duty at the quarters of Engine 13, on Dearborn Street, north of Lake, on the edge of the busy Loop. So far, the police had not molested him. But the very fact that they had not, worried him. Why were they delaying? The morning papers were making a holiday of the murder of Pipeman Degitz, and Kenny realized that the members of the crew of Engine 13 eyed him with suspicion, if not with actual hostility, as he opened the small door at the north side of the quarters and stepped into the apparatus room.

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Lieutenant Mike Brady, to whom he reported, was a scarred, knotty veteran, bald as a helmet, somewhat rheumatic, and with a tongue that dripped acid whenever he opened his tough lips. His face was seamed; there was smoke in his eyes; his voice was uneven, lifting shrilly, like the siren on a pumper, in the middle of a sentence.

"The wonder boy from 98!" he greeted Kenny. "Well, you can't pull any of your rough stuff here, young fellow, and get that from the start! The Johnny-Jump-Up on this crew don't sleep in no bed of roses! It's a workin' job for the ree-cruit here. Go upstairs with Pipeman Horan, and he'll show you your bunk. Be ready to roll any time from now on."

Horan, a long, spare man with reddish eyebrows and two missing front teeth, led Kenny aloft and with very few words showed him his bed and his locker, and pointed out which sliding pole he must use when a night alarm banged in; then changing the subject abruptly, he asked bluntly who had killed Degitz, and why.

"How do I know?" Kenny answered irritably. "I didn't kill him!"

"Who says you did?" Horan demanded. "Only the story's out how you're one of Joe Murillo's pets, and Murillo don't want Degitz to tell everything he knows. Degitz had a lot under his hat besides hair."

So the story of his connection with Murillo was here ahead of him! Kenny got miserably into his work clothes and slid the pole to the apparatus room.

ENGINE 13 was a two-company house. An old, sagging, brick and frame stable, built shortly after the great Chicago fire, it was one of the most ancient houses in the city, as well as one of the busiest. Many coats of red paint had failed entirely to rejuvenate it, and the new plaster on its walls had the appearance of trying to conceal old construction.

The quarters were crowded, too. Not only did the chief of department keep his car there, and sleep on the third floor, but ever since the city had rebuilt South Water Street into the sweeping elegance of Wacker Drive, Engine 32, pushed out of its old home, had come here to roost with Engine 13. This week 32 sat at the rear of the quarters, and 13, out in front, answered all first alarms. Next week the two pumpers would be reversed, and Engine 32 would move up in front, and 13, at the rear, would go into second alarm reserve. Thus alternate weeks each company received the brunt of the hard service that this location demanded.

Thirteen was a thousand-gallon Ahrens-Fox machine, like the one at 98, and No. 32 was a broad-shouldered Seagrave, as powerful a battler as the Ahrens-Fox, but less romantic in appearance. The Seagrave does not boast a glistening, nickel-plated air bell far up front. Unlike the piston pumps of the Fox, the Seagrave has a single centrifugal unit; but like the Fox, the pumper of Engine 32 could hurl a thousand gallons a minute any day.

Kenny stopped and eyed the two pumpers thoughtfully, then made his way toward the kitchen, where the combined crews of both companies had gathered around the radio.

Pipeman Horan stepped out of the screen door as Kenny approached.

"You'll ride top the rig," he directed. "On the hose. Hold on tight and don't fall off. We can't be bothered goin' back to pick you up. Might put your helmet up now, and come in and

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I'll make you acquainted with the boys."

Kenny placed his slicker and helmet on top of the hose box to be ready for an alarm, and stepped down to the tailboard. The weather, which had been bad for three days, was growing rapidly worse. Through the window in front of the alarm stand he could see fresh snow falling into the dreary street. It obscured the tall black bulk of the elevated railway structure on Lake Street, and dimmed the front of the Greek Café opposite 13's quarters, and made the twin theaters on the corner look ghostly and unreal.

Kenny had hesitated beside the pumper, and was looking out into the street, when the door opened and a policeman stepped into the room. He shook snow from his cap and unsnapped his earmuffs.

"Traffic's just about stopped," he reported. At the same moment the joker key spoke. Five taps...five... five more. Alarm of fire! A still alarm, sent to headquarters from some citizen by telephone. Lieutenant Brady glanced up at the instrument stand, and back at his morning paper. The joker spoke again. One tap . . . seven. Calling Engine 17.

EVEN Kenny, in spite of his newness in the department, swung around and looked at the board. For Engine 17 stands guard in the factory district west of the south branch of the river, just half a mile out Lake Street from the quarters of Engine 13.

Horan, from the kitchen door, shouted: "Getting that location, lieutenant?"

But Brady did not hear him. Already he had propped his elbows on the edge of the alarm stand, with the telephone receiver clamped to his left ear. He listened a moment, his hard face expressionless, then hung the receiver gently back on its hook. Truck Company No. 2, Squad 1 and Insurance Patrol 2 stilled out to the same location, in rapid succession.

"On your toes, men," Brady called back to the kitchen, where the radio was silent now and the two crews sat on the edges of the long benches, leaning forward, listening. "Just off Lake Street, acrost the river." Brady reported. Kenny, watching him, saw that his lips barely moved.

The policeman volunteered: "It'll take some going to break through the drifts over there."

Once more the joker spoke. Three taps...one tap... six taps. Another still alarm, this time for Ladder Truck 6. Right here in the Loop, on Franklin Street, in the quarters with Engine 40. Brady again jammed the receiver to his ear. As he turned back he looked confused.

"That one's over on Franklin and Washington," he said. "We'll be rolling if they pull a box there."

The men hurried forward and began to paw into slickers. The captain, commanding Engine 32, called to his crew: "All out with spades and break snow in front the doors!"

The box alarm instrument spoke. Its ticker tape rolled jerkily out of the thin glass lips of its case; its small steel teeth bit round holes in a row down the middle of the tape; its bell, slightly off key, chattered excitedly.

Eight...two...two...p a u s e... eight...two...two.

This was Box 822 coming in, and Box 822 lay just across the river to the northwest. Lieutenant Brady, his face still inscrutable, yanked open the left-hand drawer under the instrument

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stand, and with a thick, experienced thumb was turning over the cards of the running file. These cards, in numerical order, starting with Box 6 down on the south pier near the river mouth, showed the location of each telegraph station, and the numbers of engines, squads, trucks, patrols, special apparatus and chief officers responding to all alarms, from a first box call through a five-eleven.

Brady directed: "Write it down, Horan."

The senior pipeman grabbed up a short piece of chalk and turned toward the blackboard over the alarm stand. In a cramped, uphill scrawl, he wrote the number of the box, and the time, 9:14 A.M.

"Engines 3, 11, 14, and 42," Brady reported. "Truck 3 and Squad 1. We roll on second to that box."

The captain of 32, out in the driveway with his crew of snow shovelers, stuck his head into the door and demanded: "What's that come in now?"

"That box? Number 822," Brady answered, without looking up from the running file. "Corner of Illinois and Orleans. Like to be trouble over there. We roll on second."

"Can't roll," the captain objected. "Dig. That's what it amounts to. No rolling this morning. Snow's getting worse. Street cars stuck..."

The joker key spoke. One...three ...pause...two...one...two.

"Hey," Brady yelled. At the same time a deep voice, floating slowly and unexcitedly out of a loud speaker horn on the wall above the alarm stand, announced another still.

"Go to Austin and Dearborn, Engine 13. Heavy smoke reported. Heavy woodsmoke. Fire somewhere near—"

Brady screamed: "Roll!" He kicked the trip under the alarm stand; there was a whir of cogs and wheels in the automatic door openers, and the big front doors swung inward. The driver, whose name Kenny did not yet know, leaped to his place and jammed his foot down on the starter. In shirt sleeves, and with his bald head bare, Lieutenant Brady jumped up to the seat.

KENNY scrambled to his place on the hose, and found another young fireman there beside him. The other said: "My name's Sullivan. I'm a recruit, too. From the school just ahead of you. Hold on tight. Cassidy's a crazy driver."

The pumper charged through the doors, and the men of Engine 32 stepped back quickly, out of its way.

"Shovels!" Pipeman Horan yelled, and two of the firemen on the sidewalk passed up their snow shovels to the men on the tailboard. Kenny looked around. Engine 13 carried a full crew. Lieutenant, engineer, six pipemen. Need a full crew to buck this snow. The pumper swung north. It skidded into a snow bank on the west side of the street, skidded out again, dodged a stalled fruit truck, and put on speed down the center of the car tracks. At Wacker Drive, heaps of snow blocked the way. The pumper nosed into them and stuck.

"Out!" Brady yelled. "Dig!"

The men tumbled off the tailboard. Two of them wielded the snow shovels. Volunteers waded from the sidewalks with other shovels, and a squad of cleaners from Wacker Drive joined them. The pumper backed, moved forward, backed again. Then it bored through the drift. A clear space lay ahead, all the way to the river and across the bridge. The big engine screamed and the motor thundered.

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But once over the bridge the snow was still deeper.

Yellowish smoke lay in a thin cloud over the sunken railroad yards. It veiled the tops of dirty-faced buildings to the north, and mingled with the snow clouds in the sullen sky.

"Looks like quite some fire," Sullivan shouted into Kenny's ear. At the same time the pumper plowed into another drift and stuck. Eastward, on Austin Avenue, Ladder Truck 3 was fighting snow. Somewhere, across the roofs, sounded dismally the sirens of those companies answering the box alarm from Orleans and Illinois, two blocks to the northwest.

A man plunged through the snow.

"That fire's in a lamp shade works," he shouted. "Fourth floor. Somebody trapped up there."

Brady jumped down. "Back up to that hydrant," he yelled, "and lay out line! You two recruits...follow me!"

He started down Austin Avenue, toward the building to which the excited civilian pointed. Smoke hung in heavy rolls about its tall, sooty walls. Truck 9 labored fruitlessly in drifts, trying to get nearer. The lieutenant ran on. Kenny galloped at his heels.

As he came opposite the building with the smoky halo, he saw the fire. It was pouring out of windows on the third floor into a narrow courtyard that was invisible from the corner. The truck company commander had left his crew to dig out the apparatus and met Brady at the curb.

"People cut off up there, they say," Brady panted. "Best get your aërial!"

The ladderman returned, double time, toward his long, recumbent aërial. A dozen men and women stood about the doors of the lampshade factory. They repeated: "Somebody cut off...; we heard her..."

Brady plunged into the doorway.

"Follow!" he bade Kenny and Sullivan.

Kenny could see Engine 13 backing up to the hydrant. Its crew was pulling hose off the tailboard and beginning to lay line. The stairway smelled of burning cloth and paper. At the second floor a big metal door blocked the way. Brady jammed his foot against the floor, two inches from the door, and turned the knob. A blast of heat and fire rushed out the narrow crack.

"Cut off right!" he shouted, and passed Kenny, as he ran down the stair. "Got to get ladders...help that truck crew..."

SULLIVAN and Kenny followed together toward the laboring ladder truck. As he went Kenny glanced upward again. The flames were waving long red arms out of second and third story windows. And in the fourth floor—he swung around, gaping. A woman. A woman, on the narrow edge of the sill. Smoke swirled around her.

Brady cried: "Don't jump, lady! Don't jump! Truck 9! Nets! Life nets!"

The ladder captain heard him. Rapidly the big canvas life net, folded into half a circle on the running board of the truck, unfolded as the laddermen snatched it.

Kenny ran past them. In the tool box under the body he dug through the snow. In a moment he found what he searched for. First a coil of rope. Then a pompier hook.

The pompier, a stout wooden staff a dozen feet long, has a curved gooseneck hook at its upper end. The underside of the hook is fitted with steel teeth. Through the staff, at twelve-inch intervals, are driven steel rods.

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With the rope on his shoulder and the pompier in his hand, Kenny charged back toward the building. Once more he passed the truck crew, struggling in snow drifts with their ungainly life net.

The ladder captain cried: "Hey, where you going with that hook?"

It was Brady who answered: "Leave him be! Can you climb, recruit? Ought to, just out drill school! Well, climb!"

Kenny ran to the building wall, straightened the rope coil over his shoulder so that it would not interfere with his arms, and lifted the pompier overhead. He aimed at a second floor window, pointed the iron hook at the lower pane, and let drive. Glass tumbled over his helmet. He jerked the pompier down till the teeth on the hook caught on the sill. Then climbed. Hand over hand. Foot over foot. The staff swayed with his motion. Six steps... eight...he caught the window sill in his glove, pulled himself up. Smoke came through the broken panes to meet him.

He thrust his left leg through the hole, released the hook, lifted the staff high overhead, once more drove the metal point. Again glass clattered down upon him. Below he could see the ladder crew opening the life net. The woman above him was crying for help.

He pulled the hook tight again and climbed. Heat beat down on him. Snow blinded him. The pompier swung like the pendulum of a drunken clock. He held tight, not daring now to look down. He had done it so often in drill school. Could he do it now?

His hand found the hot sill of the third story.

"Don't jump, lady! Don't jump!" That was Lieutenant Brady, still bellowing. "Hold on...hold tight! Get up there, ree-cruit! Up! Up! Up!"

KENNY'S knees caught the sill. He could see the fire, marching across the room to meet him. He lifted the pompier and drove it again. Dragged it tight. Climbed. The woman was shouting inarticulately. Fire swept out of the window above her head. There was no time to waste. Not a split second. Kenny caught the fourth floor sill. Crouching there, he jerked the coil of line off his shoulder. The woman interfered, trying to help.

"Easy, sister," he bade. "Anybody else up here?"

"No! Alone! Quick..." she broke off, sobbing.

He looped the line around her body, under the armpits, made it fast behind, then, ducking his head in his collar, he slipped into the blazing room.

"Let yourself down," he bade. "I'll let you slide, slow."

The woman hung a moment by her fingers from the sill, her body dangling over the courtyard. Then she let go. The weight tightened the rope in Kenny's hands. He braked it against the sill, letting it out slowly, a foot at a time. The fire snapped at the back of his neck. Down...down...down... suddenly the weight relaxed. She was on the ground.

Flame chewed Kenny's neck. He could feel the rubber on his slicker melting. Out in the courtyard he made out the reflection of the blaze, roaring through the third story window he just had passed. He could not get down with the pompier. He felt blindly along the wall. His hands touched a steam radiator. Quickly he tied the end of his rope to it, wrapped his arms about the line, passed it between his knees, and let himself slide. He clamped

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his elbows tightly to his sides, so that he dropped slowly, the rope letting him slide only a foot at a time. He passed the third story. Passed the second. His helmet fell off. The rope did not grip tightly. He slid. Hands caught him.

He heard Brady's voice: "Good job for a ree-cruit!" Then, louder, "Bring that line, Horan! Hit 'er from here! Pulled the box yet, cap? Okay... water! Water, Engine 13! Now men, hit that window there!"

Kenny, panting and blistered, took his place. Interminably, Engine 13 labored alone. The men from the ladder truck at last got their aërial up the front of the building and took a second line off the pumper. Squad 10, half an hour late; Engine 27, which had fought snow all the way from Goethe Street; Engine 98, with Captain Hannon silent, and Pipeman Blumenthal in Degitz's place; Engine 32, which 13 had left behind in its quarters on Dearborn Street—all these answered the second alarm. Truck 19 and the companies responding to the three-eleven waded deep snow, arrived too late, and made ice with their streams against the walls of the lampshade works.

The fire had been burning an hour when the chief of department strode toward the crew of Engine 13, still driving their stream from a courtyard.

"Who made that rescue, Brady?" he demanded.

"The ree-cruit you just sent over from 98," the lieutenant replied.

"Hum," the chief grunted.

Two other men in civilian clothes had followed him into the court. "Kenny, you mean?"

"That's his name," Brady said.

"Kenny!" the chief called. "Come here, Kenny. Relieve him from duty, lieutenant. Kenny, these gentlemen want to see you."

The two civilians looked thoughtfully at Kenny.

"We're from the bureau," one of them explained. "We want you, Kenny."

"Want me? What do you want me for?"

"For the Degitz murder. Come along."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GRILLING.

THE two detectives stood knee-deep in the snow, their hands in overcoat pockets, eyes on John Kenny's scorched face. At one side, the chief of department waited, with a knit cap which somehow gave the impression that it had been borrowed, pulled down over his dark, graying hair.

"Whole thing's beyond me, sergeant," he told one of the officers. "But I'm going to see it through. My department, you know. Degitz... Kenny...my men...have to see it through. I've got my opinions, of course."

"We all got 'em," the first detective agreed. "Not that I been on this case from the start, understand. All I know about it is what I read in the papers and what I hear at the bureau before we were sent over to get this Kenny. We're taking him back there, chief."

"I've got a couple of multiple alarms to handle," the chief replied, rubbing his chin with his glove. "Got to look them over, anyhow, if I can get my buggy through. But I'll come to the bureau some time this afternoon."

The larger of the two detectives said, "Better get moving, Kenny. Let's go."

Kenny's temper flared. "You'll not take me over there in my helmet!" he

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objected. "Not in my helmet. Anyhow, I didn't kill Degitz!"

"Not so fast," one officer told him. "Plenty of time to talk when you get there. You'll have the chance, believe me."

The detectives waded the deep snow, one before, the other behind him. They went first to the quarters of Engine 13, where this very morning Kenny had reported for duty. He climbed silently to the bunk room, opened his new locker, left his slicker and helmet in it, and put on his dress uniform.

The older of the two officers had followed him up the long stair, chatting casually, keeping an unobtrusive eye upon his prisoner. The surveillance enraged Kenny. The officer, whose name was Perkins, observed this fact.

"Don't take on," he cautioned. "If you was innocent as a convent cat, you'd be yanked in on this. Too many things for you to explain. Too many mix-ups. Too much talk about you. Besides, there's Packy O'Ryan telling as how you threatened Degitz—"

"O'Ryan!" Kenny repeated. He was buttoning his tunic, and he halted, staring at the officer. Decision came to him suddenly. He had talked too much? Why, he hadn't told half enough! Silence, not his tongue, had got him into this. "I'm going to tell what I know about O'Ryan!"

From below stairs rose the voice of the other policeman.

"Don't spend all day chinning," he warned. "Remember, lieutenant's waiting."

"Come on, Kenny," Perkins said.

"When I get through, Packy O'Ryan will know I've talked, too!" Kenny went on angrily. "I'll tell things!"

Lissen," Perkins warned, his voice pitched low. "For your own good, whether you're guilty or not, don't bring O'Ryan's name into this unless you got to. If you do...well, Packy O'Ryan is poison, you understand, and he acts like it. It'll be curtains for you if you talk, Kenny, and try to hook him. Smarter guys than you have tried it, and the only place it got 'em was the morgue. Drag O'Ryan into this, and next thing you know you'll go for a ride and come back with your lips cut off!"

"He's tried to send me on a ride, before," Kenny said; and the detective, who had started toward the stair, turned quickly.

"Tried it?" he repeated. He thought a moment, then bade: "Come on. Lieutenant's waiting."

THE detective bureau smelled of disinfectant and old cigar smoke. The lieutenant, whose name was Moriarity, was a large-jawed man who smoked an old, comfortable pipe and leaned far back in his chair, with his hands folded across his broad middle. Kenny noticed that his coat and vest did not exactly match, and that the vest lacked one button. He looked like the kind of man it would be easy to talk to, who would understand plain, honest speech.

"Kenny," he began, "I got some questions to ask you. As to answering them, suit yourself. We're getting some place on this killing, and I'm sorry to say that place looks like it's right up your alley. To begin with, let's go back a year or so. How long have you known Joe Murillo?"

Kenny looked thoughtfully at Moriarity, and once more determined to tell everything he knew, everything. He'd leave nothing out. He'd give names, places, dates as near as he could remember them. There were lots of

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names, lots of things to tell. Joe Murillo, the man Novitski, the O'Ryan gunman who looked more like a weasel than anything else, O'Ryan himself, Degitz, the Rathauer fire, the incident in the alley beside the picture theater down back of the Yards, the fire in the garage, and Degitz's abandonment of him there; the incident of Joe Gennaro's wife, and of Purkis, the lawyer. He'd tell everything. Every fact, bar none.

"Well," the lieutenant urged, "you might as well come through."

The sergeant, who had brought Kenny here—his name was Goldberg, Kenny discovered—and Detective Perkins sat back silently and listened. Kenny began his story with his first attempt to get into the fire department. He told of his father, and his desire to get into one of the two companies in the Yards, of his disappointment at finding the lists closed when he went to the city hall, and of Murillo's offer out of a clear sky.

"That was when he was building up his mob, yes," Moriarity nodded. "He puts you into the place of one of the others in drill school. That's an old trick the political boys have. But they never expect to give something for nothing. These big time hoods aren't Santa Claus, you know. They expect to get paid, one way or another, for every favor. You ought to have known that." He puffed his pipe and added, "And then you come out of school and get assigned to Engine 98?"

"Before that," Kenny said, "I had a run-in with O'Ryan."

"Run-in?" Moriarity repeated.

Kenny, turning, saw that Detective Perkins was watching disapprovingly; Perkins, who had warned that even mention of O'Ryan's name was dangerous.

"One of Packy's rats tried to get me to join the racket union when I worked at Rathauer's," Kenny began. "Introduced me to O'Ryan. I wouldn't join. O'Ryan said it was a mistake not to. Then, the night of the fire at Rathauer's, I was down in the Yards helping put out fire in some cars, when this same little hoodlum came along and started the fire again, after we got it out."

Sergeant Goldberg demanded: "Who was he?"

"Never have heard his name," Kenny said. He finished the account of the night's experience in the Yards, of his being shot, and going to the hospital.

"Why didn't you tell somebody about that?" Moriarity demanded. "Some officers investigated your case ...I've got their report right here. Why didn't you talk at the time?"

"Didn't want to get into trouble," Kenny explained. "As it was, I did say something. Somebody who heard me told Murillo. That's how he happened to come around, talking about good government."

The lieutenant looked at him thoughtfully.

"And then what?" he asked finally.

KENNY went on. He was burning bridges behind him and didn't care. He had been silent too long as it was. Now, without worrying about consequences, he talked...talked ...talked. Occasionally the lieutenant made a note on a pad, twice lifted his shoe, struck a match on its sole, and relighted his pipe.

"Novitski, eh?" he repeated, when Kenny mentioned Murillo's slugger. "Look him up in the files, Perkins. Name kind of sticks in my memory."

Still Kenny talked. Fury oiled his

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tongue so that it wagged recklessly. While Moriarity listened gravely he recited all that he knew of Packy O'Ryan's hand in his own troubles, his split with Murillo; he told of Novitski's attempt to lure him into the alley, and of how the O'Ryan gangster had almost captured both of them. Then he repeated the story of his trip down back of the Yards, and of seeing Degitz and O'Ryan together, that noon on South Halsted Street. There the lieutenant halted him.

"Well, well!" he said. "Are you sure? Sure they were together? O'Ryan claims he doesn't know anything about Degitz."

Kenny started to reply, but an officer knocked on the door, and stepped into the room.

"Lawyer out here," he said. "Fellow named Purkis. Says he wants to see his client. Yeh, Kenny."

Moriarity demanded: "Is Purkis your lawyer, Kenny?"

Kenny answered, hotly: "No, sir. When I was up before the chief, he came in. Said he'd been sent to defend me. He's Murillo's lawyer. I never saw him before."

"We know he's Murillo's lawyer!" the lieutenant said dryly. "Send him in, sergeant. I'd like to talk to him myself."

The attorney still carried the bulging briefcase, and looked no more presentable than he had in the office of the chief of the fire department. He smiled, showing his bad teeth, and nodded to the officers, and clapped his hand down on Kenny's shoulder.

"You haven't got any right questioning this man without his attorney," he began. "I'm here to look after his constitutional rights. I want—"

"I'll take care of his rights, Purkis," Moriarity snapped.

"Bet you haven't even warned him!" the lawyer retorted. "Didn't warn you, did he, Kenny? Didn't explain to you that every word you say can be used against you? High-handed, I call it, Moriarity! You cops will get in plenty trouble some day over that sort of thing. My advice to you, Kenny, is to walk out on him! You don't have to stay here. Walk right out—"

"He'll not walk out, Purkis," the lieutenant said, and sat up straighter.

"No? How come he won't? Have you got any charges against him? Maybe I'd best spring him on a writ, lieutenant. I guess—"

"I don't care what you guess, Purkis. I tell you, I'm holding this man as long as I want, and that may be some time. He's mixed up in a lot of funny business. What's more, I'm going to hold you."

"Me?" Purkis shook his head. "No, you haven't got anything on me!"

"Got plenty on you. And on Joe Murillo, too, if it's anything to you. Enough to put you away down in Joliet from now on."

"Always picking on somebody," Purkis complained.

The lieutenant bade Sergeant Goldberg: "Take him away. I'll finish with Kenny, then I want to talk to him. Meantime, see what the boys have found about Murillo." When Goldberg had led Purkis away, protesting, he continued, "Now, Kenny, you say you saw O'Ryan and Degitz together. Go on from there."

Kenny finished his story. When he came to the episode in the Chicago Avenue building, where Degitz had left him, stunned by smoke, at the foot of the stair, Kenny halted. Moriarity had held up his hand.

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"Made you pretty mad, did he?"

"Sure, it made me mad. Who wouldn't be mad?"

"Mad enough to wipe him out if you got the chance?"

"What do you mean?" Kenny asked.

The benevolence had fallen from the lieutenant's face. He put down his cold pipe, unfolded his hands from his big waist. He leaned forward.

"I mean this, Kenny. There's witnesses heard you tell Degitz you'd get even with him." Kenny started to speak, but the lieutenant halted him. "They'll swear it. There's other witnesses who will swear they saw you near Degitz's house last evening."

"I wasn't out of my room!"

"Prove it!" Moriarity challenged. "Bring any one you want to prove it! Meanwhile, you're going to stick around here. Not in arrest, you understand. Not yet. That in good time. After we've got hold of Murillo, after we've got plenty to hold you, believe me, we'll hold. Meantime, I want to thank you for what you've told me about—several things. Take him out, Perkins, and cool him off."

CHAPTER XVII.

O'RYAN'S THREAT.

THE rest of the day John Kenny sat on a hard chair that creaked whenever he shifted his weight in it, and looked at a faded greenish wall with thumb marks around the electric light switch. Sat and waited. Waited interminably. Uniformed policemen and detectives opened the door, pushed occasional nondescript citizens into the room, motioned to other hard chairs, and ordered: "Sit down!" Or they opened the door and crooked their fingers at nondescript citizens already waiting there, who got up with alacrity and followed the officers.

Sometimes the door remained open several minutes; then voices floated into the room, and the sound of footfalls echoed in the passageway, heavy footfalls, moving up and down, up and down. John Kenny felt his scorched face with his fingertips. What a break this was!

With any luck, that pompier job on the wall of the lampshade factory this morning would have put him on the honor roll for the year, and perhaps an advance of ten points in eligibility rating. Two rescues, this had been, in a week. Two women.

Dinner time and supper time came and went, and with them scores of other prisoners, some sullen, some tricky, some bold, some defiant, some hopeless, most of them just plain scared. Then a policeman opened the door, and it was Kenny's turn to see a finger crooked at him.

"Lieutenant wants you," the officer said, and led him to Moriarity's room. The lieutenant was no longer alone. The first person Kenny saw was the chief of department, in civilian clothes, sitting on the edge of the desk with his black felt hat pushed back on his head, and an unlighted cigar in his teeth. The chief looked up and greeted Kenny with a half nod, as if he were not sure he recognized this recruit in his new dress uniform. Kenny's eyes moved from him to the other man, who sat just inside the window. Seeing him, he stared.

For the face that smiled at him was that of Packy O'Ryan.

"Hello, Kenny," he said affably. "I see you've gone and got yourself in a jam."

Kenny did not reply. He merely

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waited, staring at O'Ryan, while the chief nervously rolled the unlighted cigar in his teeth.

"Kenny," the lieutenant said, leaning farther back and once more folding his hands across his middle, "I've been working on your case all day. And I've turned up several things. Mr. O'Ryan, here, is demanding that I bring the charge of murder against you."

"Well, well." O'Ryan lifted his hand. "Hardly that. I say that Kenny's mistaken. I say that—well, Murillo has a habit of putting wrong ideas in the heads of the people that gang with him."

"We've heard all that, Mr. O'Ryan," the lieutenant interrupted. A testy note crept into his voice. "The reason I sent for you in the first place was to ask you some questions. Your name kept popping up in this case, and I thought you'd like to give us a hand clearing it up. Sergeant Dunnigan," he spoke to a plain-faced man whose somber blue serge and steel-rimmed glasses gave him the look of a country parson, "I wish you'd bring Mike Donkin in."

KENNY, who was peering at O'Ryan at the moment, saw the politician's mouth tighten and his neck stretch up slightly. The sergeant disappeared into the corridor, at once reappeared dragging a man by the wrist.

At sight of his face Kenny cried out. For there could be no doubt about who Mike Donkin was. Kenny would have recognized him at midnight in the darkest back street of Hades—here was the weasel!

"Ever see this rat, Kenny?" the lieutenant demanded, with a nod of his head toward Donkin. He added quickly, "Better tell the truth, you know."

"Sure." Kenny's throat was dry, and he cleared it. "Sure, I've seen him. He's the guy that shot me down at Rathauer's. He introduced me to—to Mr. O'Ryan, here—"

O'Ryan grunted: "Fairy story! Kenny's trying an out, lieutenant." He scowled at Donkin. "What you say this man's name is? Donkin? Well, I don't know him. Never saw him before. Did I, fellow? You ever set eyes on me before?"

Shrewdness lighted the face that reminded Kenny of a weasel.

"No, sir. Never see you before, mister," he agreed.

"See?" Packy O'Ryan demanded. He stood up and gestured sharply at Moriarity. "That's what I say about you cops—take the word of some featherbrain—"

"Don't need to get upset, Packy," the lieutenant said and refolded his hands over his middle. "Nobody's been accusing you of anything."

"I'll not stand it!" O'Ryan persisted. "Don't have to stand it! I tell you, I hadn't seen Degitz in months. . . maybe years. . ."

"That's a lie," Kenny shouted. "You two were together on South Halsted Street just the other—"

"Shut up," the lieutenant bade. "When I want talk out of you, Kenny, I'll ask for it. Till then, button up, and stay buttoned. What do you want now, Sergeant Goldberg?"

The man who first had arrested Kenny had opened the door and stepped silently into the room. He looked as if he had just seen a ghost, and his voice, when he spoke, was husky.

"Speak to you, sir? Outside?"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

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There was a terrific blast; scalding water sprayed the stokehold

Old Fire-Tongue

By BERTON E. COOK

Danger prowls the engine room when an overloaded freighter steams into a storm

TRAVIS BRIGGS was the humblest man in Boston on that autumn morning. Ten months ashore, the price of a devastating tongue; ten months out of ship—and no knowing how much longer it would continue. Travis Briggs had changed.

He plodded along at the edge of the curb, now, head a trifle bowed, lips sealed and belt drawn to the last notch. Ex-Chief Engineer Briggs was paying dearly for the arguments his whip-lashing tongue had won aboard the Lariat, those ten long months ago; he was hungry.

But this was Tuesday again, and that desk man down in the licensed mariners' shipping office had said, "Sure; sure thing, chief. Come around Tuesday, every Tuesday. Might have a chance for you, might have something—sometime."

The collier Grenadier was barely docked in East Boston when Captain Ansel Liggett hopped ashore. The only quirk in his morning's program was a last minute croak from Chief Marcey:

"Cap'n, it's the third's turn, y' know; I've got to have me a third engineer in his place. And I've got too

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much rheumatics to go tumbling ashore after one. S'pose you could get me a good, reliable man?"

Captain Liggett made a wry smile over that word "reliable." He agreed to do his best. Chief wanted assistants these days who'd carry the load—sometimes his own included. Liggett was far from content with this situation aft, was often tempted to influence big changes there. Now, however, he promised and hurried up the pier and into traffic. But he couldn't help thinking: Why didn't Marcey buck up, get his own men? Wants a man he won't have to watch, one that that fresh young Thoms can bruit about . . . while the third's on vacation. Marcey and his liniments and pills—and bed . . .

Suddenly the skipper looked up, discovered a small man, a hungry fellow with sunken eyes under black hair; and that familiar mouth—"It can't be possible!" He hurried across the narrow street.

"Good ol' argumentative Travis Briggs!" he cried, hand out ready to shake.

Briggs beamed all over him, beamed until his ears caught that reminiscent word. A r g u m e n t a t i v e ? His face muscles stiffened. He winced. His thin hand came limp from the shake. So Liggett was a captain now. Aye, ten months could do much for a man—do much to a man, also. But Liggett had grasped the situation with the handshake, for Briggs's hand was too soft and thin for that of an engineer on the job. He looked defeated, hungry. So the skipper of the Grenadier took a bold plunge; he offered Briggs the job aboard.

"Only a third assistant's berth, chief," he was saying, "but we've got to have a particularly reliable man right away. Want it? Forgive me if I've insulted . . ."

Briggs insulted? Did he want it—after starving ten months ashore? He accepted swiftly, got the ship's name, her berth. He was on his way before the captain had begun to tell him: Marcey was a veritable recluse, his first and second engineers little more than sounds-and-bays bred youngsters, too cocksure; and his job wasn't for very long . . .

Liggett watched the slight figure dart away, melt into the crowds. "I should have warned that man not to argue with the outfit as he used to on the Lariat. He a chief then, I only mate; ten months ago. Ah-hum." He wagged his head and went on. The fate of Travis Briggs would be up to himself now; Captain Liggett wouldn't discuss such matters aboard.

THAT noon Chief Marcey rose to one elbow, took a pill and surveyed Liggett's find. And Briggs did the same for Marcey. But it was Marcey who did the talking, between grunts, while Briggs nearly choked in nose-wringing fumes of liniment and cures on the little desk.

He edged away to the door, got out at the first opportunity. And bumped into Thoms, the young first assistant, in the engine room.

"Y' oughta know your duties," piped Thoms truculently. "Look after the lower engine; I tend out up here. Chief told you he expects us all to get along without his dippin' in? Yeah, that's the idea—and it's me that carries the load on this packet!" This last came more as a threat, a boasting threat to Travis Briggs, whose papers rated him "chief."

And Briggs set his teeth in a Verdun wall that clamped back his ready

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tongue. Not one word escaped him. Ten lean months had been a long time to think before arguing.

Briggs went below to his job; overheard Thoms talking to Gordon, the second, as hand-in-glove cronies will talk, unaware. Anyway, who cared that the new guy down below there somewhere could hear it? Certainly not they.

"Buddy," laughed Thoms, "that new lad's got gray hairs. Looks worried. He's scared of his job, anxious as hell—yeah, I mean it! It's a laugh, bozo. He's either an old feller gittin' his papers too late or a dumb clam too thick to pass second's exams. You 'nd me still sit pretty here. We'll give him the works, keep 'im in his place."

"Or he'll be telling us how he did on the liners," Gordon added. "Yeah. Keep him hoppin'—plenty."

Maybe they didn't. They bedevilled Briggs off watch and on. Kidded him about eccentrics, valve action, power ratios, coal-performance percentage. Kidded Travis Briggs, who knew more about engines and Scotch boilers than the both of them would in years.

And Briggs? Argumentative Briggs could have sent them outside to read his certificate, could have laid rawhide welts on their bumps of conceit with one blast of breath. But he didn't. Not a word did he utter. They scarcely knew the sound of his voice. And to think that ten months ago it was he who had been dishing out this sort of thing! Now he was taking it. Oh, his agile tongue itched to get going, but he said in his purged mind, "Not here. No, siree!"

Nor was his hazing confined to words. The port engineer came aboard, same port engineer who had dealt with Chief Travis Briggs on the Lariat. Today he didn't even see Briggs, his business was with Marcey. While Gordon and Briggs slept, he poked around, suspicious of so much responsibility being entrusted to two young bounders. He spent much time in the boiler room while Thoms fussed over the cylinder heads. Then he returned to Marcey's room.

"CHIEF," said he, "your man Gordon's neglecting your boilers. Those main and auxiliary valves haven't been turned since Rome took fire. Smoke doors are froze to and I guess your tubes haven't been cleaned in—"

Chief Marcey was pilling up again. He cut in artfully with: "Seen the new third assistant Liggett dug up? Huh!"

"Cap'n told me. I remember Briggs anyway."

"So? Thoms says he's scared a'ready, scared of his job."

The port engineer took one prolonged look at this chronic invalid, began to figure him a man who enjoyed poor health.

"Chief," he countered a bit sharply, "Travis Briggs'll be a life-saver around here. That man knows steam. Your two bantams ought to learn things from him. Briggs scared? Say, you're the one to be scared; he could show you— Well, never mind. I've got a new ash-ejector coming right aboard. Have them install it pronto, Briggs'll understand just how . . ."

The ejector came.

Briggs watched it slide on lines into the stoke-hold, stood within earshot when Thoms assembled men to remove the old one and install the new. Briggs would overlook the most recent unpleasantnesses, explain to Thoms just how that job could be done quickly—as he had done it on the Lariat.

But Briggs was left out of it. Thoms

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glanced at him, discerned his expectant air—and laughed in his face. Two oilers and the fireman went along on that chore; Travis Briggs stayed above, alone.

And took the ridicule without an argument. How much more he'd endure in silence was something that burned him up. So simple to deflate those two kids; just a few caustic, jarring reminders . . . he was stung to the core. Not fierce about heavy labor after months of scant rations, understand, but what licensed man will stand it to be rated less useful than stokers? And Briggs's certificate specified "any ocean."

Once again he was taking it; trembling in self-control.

All night the boiler room clanged. Voices hurled one "right way" after another to install that simple ash ejector. The old one stuck. Steam fittings went cockeyed. Thoms and Gordon bent two lengths of pipe, got the steam jet around where it would have blown the ashes back into the fire room! They cursed the job, turned upon each other for some one to blame.

Briggs was getting his sleep when Captain Liggett looked down upon the foolish performance of men born to be directed, glanced accusingly toward Marcey's room—and went away disgusted.

Briggs was yet asleep when sweating, raw-nerved, irate Thoms blew into his room in his grime and shook the third engineer clean out of his bed.

"What the hell?" he barked. "The old dogs givin' out so soon, eh?"

The man on the floor blinked dazedly.

"That new ejector! It don't fit! Gotta go in place 'fore we sail. How the hell d'you git sleep and us workin' all night on the dam' thing? Git b'low; you're an engineer, ain'tcha? Lend a hand, you!"

Travis Briggs untangled his lean bones from the bedding on the floor. Only four short feet from his fist to that barking churl, perfect distance for one silencing swipe. Briggs doubled his fist. A just wrath leaped to his tongue—then he remembered his failing.

A diffident grin began on his face; but the coal-black eyes flashed their warning. Instinct saved Thoms that time; he slid out of reach, hurried away.

TRAVIS BRIGGS soon followed—to rectify a dozen wrongs before the ejector could be started into place right. One squint at it and his rage mounted . . . and "engineers" did this . . . and that! Blundering pups!

He gaged the jumbled tools, the battered old ashtrap, the new one already dented. He grinned disgustedly at the reversed jet.

"Funny's hell, ain't it?" Thoms was sarcastic.

"Gonna gawk at it all night?" put in Gordon.

"He never saw one before," Thoms played up.

That one got a laugh from the oilers—until the stokers took it up. Then came a miracle.

Something snapped abruptly in Briggs's brain. He clamped onto Thoms's neck, wheeled him, shook him, ran him headlong to the iron ladder, started him up with a perfectly placed boot.

"Out of here before I kill you!" His voice was hoarse with fury. "Read the license of Travis Briggs in the alleyway. You posing as an engineer—you!"

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Immediately he took charge. Two oilers and three firemen swarmed over that old ejector. Out it came. Gordon kept one eye on the wrench in Briggs's fist; he hunched over the jet, set it correctly under orders that blazed with merciless, barbed indictments on engineers who bungled so simple a job. The words flew—they stung. Travis Briggs's tongue had sprung to a living fire once more.

The new outfit jumped into place, was working before Thoms even dared to show his head. And up there in the alley he went completely dumb at sight of the skipper around a corner! But Marcey was in his room through all this; Captain Liggett noted that.

Finally six gaping, steaming men stood in awe. The job was done in remarkable time. They watched Briggs go to the ladder; and, in a whisper to Gordon, oiler Galvin said: "Say, Second, that guy knows!"

But the thrill of triumph was not for Briggs. He locked his door on the inside, tore off his clothes, hove them everywhere and cursed himself bitterly. On and on his loosed tongue crackled, cut the air, muffled only by the whirring fan overhead. He was mad, stark mad. His tongue had bested him again.

Unable to curb it, he groped for some diversion, something to sidetrack his rage. His usual relief had been reading; but Briggs had sold his books, sold them piecemeal, reluctantly, for the price of coffee and beef.

Desperately he scoured the room; surely the last occupant must have read something. He swept the desk clean, searched the corners, roamed in blind circles, cursed himself and Thoms and ashtraps.

Moments later, Travis Briggs, half naked, intense, sat humped over a wee volume, a book. He had found it away back in the bottom drawer beneath his bed. Now he was peering at the page to which it had opened automatically—and the words he saw were: "The tongue is a fire . . . the tongue can no man tame!"

THE Grenadier steamed into Newport News for coal, but this time she took only bunkers. A strange hush fell upon her crew. Yes, times were unsettled, charters hanging, but why no cargo? Where to next? What's the charter?

Then came the flash. Captain Liggett told it guardedly to hide his concern. Very soon two mates were talking carefully in the officers' shower. Presently the mate bent low at number one hatch, as though to examine what his bosun there was doing to the eyebolts. Then the bosun went aft for a drink of water—and the mess boy he met put straightway for the fo'castle! Within mere minutes the whole crew understood: the old Grenadier was southbound for phosphate rock at Boca Grande on the Florida west coast.

Thoms got it to Gordon in the engine room, and Gordon— "This to Boca Grande? This? She's old, she's designed for short trips — small bunkers—stem-winder, hatches all exposed to pounding at once—"

"Hey! That's the mate's worry," cut in Thoms. More thoughtfully he added, "Hurricane season, at that."

"Gods!" gasped Gordon, thoroughly alarmed. "I forgot; chief told me in Boston to have a look at the boiler tubes—maybe blow them!"

"Yeah, sure . . ."

"That ejector came. I—I forgot all about it!"

Thoms didn't like the way he said it, perceived a profound anxiety in his

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startled eyes. But all he could muster was: "Too late now. Oughta keep after old boilers like these by yourself without bein' told . . . sixty-five hundred ton o' rock—deadweight, lifeless rock. Imagine! So-ome wallowin' if it gits nasty . . . hurricane season! Well, kid, we're elected!"

Travis Briggs heard it all. He had seen the Gulf more than once, seen hurricanes, knocked out heat-crazed stokers to save them from suicide. Ah, yes, he could have turned his tongue on these two smart-alecks with facts alone that would have appalled them, could Travis Briggs!

Instead, he went directly below, inspected main and auxiliary engines, generators, everything; precisely as a chief—a wide-awake chief—would do. Then he did what no ordinary third engineer does: he went all over the boilers. He loosened those vital valves between boilers that separate one from the other when one goes bad. He tried the smoke doors, studied a score of things that a chief learns to watch.

Then he tightened main valves, auxiliaries, smoke doors—and peered so long into a firebox that his eyebrows singed. That was a terribly low arch in these models; only the thinnest of men could crawl into one of them and hope to get back alive. That low-slung arch, red hot, long—what an awful distance to the standing room at the back!

The tubes were filthy, too. Damn the irresponsible Thomses and Gordons on offshore ships—and superiors who left these vital matters of live steam to such lads. If the long run around Florida should prove too much in a stretch—or foul weather set in . . . 'twould be terrible.

He reported the situation to Chief Marcey. The chief distinctly recalled that he had ordered Gordon, the proper man, to look to his boilers. He heard Briggs to the end, growled something about a third engineer's sphere of activity aboard a ship—and opened his liniment. Briggs got out.

BEFORE his next watch ended, Travis Briggs searched every square foot of the engine room. That failing, he searched the boiler room, prowled the stoke-hold, the darkest nooks. He refused to believe that an old ship, of all craft, could be at sea, on an overlong trip, without—then he found them. One pile of long iron rods with big, thick, rubber gaskets at either end—and nuts to squeeze them to greater diameters. They were away aft in the stern, in beyond the steering engine, behind a lathe.

And they were half covered with odd ends of piping and *débris*.

Now, then, did Thoms and Gordon know they were aboard? Or that those old-fashioned, patent tube stoppers near the door needn't be used? Those two fellows were so satisfied with mere routine duties, so uninquisitive — Briggs would see what they knew about tube stoppers anyway.

His chance came immediately. Back in his engine room, he came upon the officious Thoms all set for a scene. At last Thoms had something on this silent guy who'd made a fool of him—at last!

"Hidin' away below on watch, huh?" he snarled, forgetting that Marcey was the chief engineer here.

Briggs's jaw opened — and he had plenty to say. Then it closed tight. His black eyes blazed. A thousand retorts, damning truths, evidences of neglect around here, leaped to his tongue. He, a careful chief, taking this stuff? Ab-

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ruptly into his memory leaped that warning: "The tongue is a fire . . ."

Travis Briggs resorted to a smile, asked coldly, "You know, do you, that there's a pile of long, iron rods away aft? Rods with rubber gaskets at either end?"

Thoms eyed him, stalling, not quite certain that this queer character was aware that he was only the third—or even sane.

"Better remember those rods, first." Briggs's grin meant much, should have hinted to Thoms that this was no idle matter, not on a long run into hot climate—"They might prove to be our salvation before we get back north," Briggs added.

Long rods. Hot climate. Have to poke around himself in that workshop sometime, but right now— "To hell with rods and rubber, you!" That from Thoms. "And who the devil sent you away off there with your engines turning? You just watch your stokers, save fuel, see? Do your exploring in port. Save coal, man, we gotta long run between bunkerin' this trip. Hell! Iron rods, gaskets . . . piffle!"

Briggs let him run on. Already his watch had saved more coal than those of Thoms and Gordon combined. Briggs knew that trick to perfection, he had rounded the Keys in tight pinches plenty of times; he understood far better than they ever would. So, like the prophet without honor, he set a seal on his tongue. No. On second thought, he would tell this pup what they were, where they lay, those merciful, man-saving tube plugs with gaskets. He would—

Thoms wheeled and went out before he said it; Thoms, so full of gloat and fuel-saving he had scarcely heard Briggs's story—anyway, this Briggs wasn't just right about anything; his chatter had been an attempt to cover up, concluded Thoms.

Travis Briggs ended that watch in disgust, half minded to speak to the chief. But Marcey's light was out; he was snoring above the noise from the engine room. Briggs marveled at the chief of the Grenadier; one of these fine days he'd get a sad jolt. And when he did . . . !

SUFFOCATING heat. Flat sea. Air that hung like a grand, vaulted muffler; it stifled the Grenadier, baked her plates to a shimmer of back-flung waves of radiation. Fans blew the heat without cooling. The engine room seethed at a hundred degrees, the stokehold at a hundred plus. Firemen gasped, mopped soot and sweat, cursed, damned the Gulf in October. Sailors panted under the shady awning aft. There was no wind.

Travis Briggs lay stark still on his bunk under a fan, lay relaxed until sleep stole over him. He knew the trick.

The Grenadier's radio whined through static. Sparks, bare to the belt, ran above with the message; a hurricane! Coming across the course, just east of the collier's position.

Captain Liggett read it aloud. The ship cut a half circle, turned tail to the threat and ran away.

Within the hour another message: Second hurricane due to cross to westward of the collier. She stood now between two major disturbances, not as yet in the path of either . . . not yet.

The captain read that one aloud. The helmsman went aft to read the log. On his way he spilled the news.

Men eyed the huge vault of weird blue overhead, saw red menace hover on opposite horizons, talked guardedly, now of this, now that, kept tabs on the rising sea. This here old Grenadier, she

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wa'n't lucky; she was ancient, unfit for this run in October— Hark! Already she creaked and groaned.

Suddenly the telegraphs clanged in the engine room. "Slow Ahead . . . Stand By!" Listen here, what's wrong?

It got around; she was hove to. She'd wait it out here, hover between hells, let them scud on by—if only they kept to their charted courses.

From seventy-five revolutions per minute down to forty—then thirty! Travis Briggs came off his hot bunk. Experience had taught Briggs the veiled threat in slowed engines at sea; and in these latitudes . . . the ship was tossing her sixty-five hundred tons of sluggish rock up—and down. ". . . twenty-eight, twenty-nine"—Briggs counted while he hurried out.

Close to the throttle stood Gordon, white, wide-eyed, speechless for once—his first hurricane threat. Older men had been "working on" him. Briggs did notice, though, how his big eyes made covert, half-expectant dashes toward the boilers—those same boilers Gordon, same Gordon, had neglected in port.

Thoms blew in. "Well, bud, we're in for it!" he blurted. "Eatin' good coal at a standstill, no knowin' how long."

"Worse; we'll drift for miles; have to make it all up on more coal," Gordon complained. "Helluva mess!"

Briggs pitied them; for all their swagger and licenses and loose gab, they were only kids in their twenties.

"Whadda yer mean, 'mess'? She's cuttin' square, we're okay here, storms'll only pass us both ends at once," exclaimed Thoms as though who cares a rap.

But Gordon's eyes traveled again toward those boilers. Presently Thoms caught on, understood the furtive glances. He, too, did it . . . "Rotten luck!" he snapped.

Abruptly he jerked his head aside, favored Gordon with a long, solemn wink. Together they stared at Briggs, watched him stop at the stokehold ladderhead and look all around inside—just look and peer and scrutinize without saying a word. So-o! Even that third assistant was wise.

Thoms sniffed nervously, scuffed his throat. Gordon paled.

THAT afternoon the seas piled higher out of the east.

The sun shimmered down, snatched away the daylight. Ugly night; and, as though they'd been waiting for it, came long, sky-licking seas out of the west. The seas from both storms met. The Grenadier forgot her logey, rhythmic ups and downs, began cutting terrifying gyrations in a breath-taking cross-chop. She rolled, cut that off and pitched. She dove under black walls, shuddered back, corkscrewed, trembled from peak ballast tank to sternpost.

Then the wind. It howled across her, slewed her, tore at her upperworks. The stern awning ripped like a gun, flew into the night alee. One lifeboat worked loose in its chocks. A forty-two degree roll tossed it up into the gale. Crash! Falls, kindling, tarp, oars, water-cask shot into the sea. A ventilator broke away overhead, rolled off the house onto the bunker hatch, eventually clanged into the maelstrom teeming in the scuppers. The decks were a green, boiling race.

Not the only race. Chief Marcey paced the engine room alleyway, barked at Gordon, at Thoms, to ease the feed when the screw came out, to unleash it when the blades bit deep. Not satisfied with their handling of a

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racing screw, he took over the job himself, shooed them aside, groaned and hung to the throttle.

Ages afterward, Briggs took over; his watch again, his in an uproar at its peak — and Gordon hovering in the offing, damning his boilers. Briggs wanted to ease his worry, tell him she might be worse off—if she were going hot at full speed. This way, her boilers were being favored.

But they fooled him. A terrific blast cut loose. Steam shot through the fire room doorway. Scalding water sprayed the stokehold. Firemen and coal passers came up pell mell. Steam beat them to the alleyway, cloaked the engine, hissed and howled in one prolonged, blood-curdling blast.

Briggs was first man into that scalding hell. Not, however, until he had corraled the crazed stokers. Down he went, one arm over his face. At the foot of the ladder he seized stoker Sam.

"Rods . . . rubber gaskets, away aft in that workshop. Take along Luke. Beat it!" he cried, shoving them on.

Then to the third fireman, "Duck low. Open fire doors, for'ard boiler!"

That done, he himself bored on, on and up. Hot water peppered him. Steam bit in his lungs. On and still on in the wild murk and tumult.

Somehow he made it to the main valve between boilers, whirled it shut. The tumult eased a bit. He crawled gingerly, groped, plowed soot until his arm thumped against another wheel; the auxiliary valve. He closed it. Now to get chains over the smoke doors to lift them open—to push home those gasketed stoppers.

He wriggled along somehow, half blind, wheezing, thinking . . . thank God he had located those gasketed plugs before this happened . . . no death-biting crawl over fires smothered under wet coal, no flesh-roasting against those low, red-hot arches, in this awful cross sea!

HE got below just in time to bump into Gordon and Thoms. They had two planks, carrying them to an open firebox. Planks! And those two stokers had brought the gasketed plugs that went in at the front, those two now fussing with a wet canvas—and over there stood a big oiler, frying his fat at a seacock with a hose handy—and the third stoker heaving wet coal on a fire!

Briggs got to the planks, hurried on, got his hands on the man carrying their forward ends. "Thoms!" He pointed to a pile of rubber-ringed iron rods in the water—"See? No planks, man, no crawling over fires—look! Those go in at the front—smoke doors! I say—"

"You? Down here? My God, the chief's up there at the throttle. He's wobblin' like hell, sir!" It was another oiler, just down from the engine room.

"First," yelled Briggs regardless, "use your head. Drop these planks. Those gasketed . . ."

Thoms heard nothing, saw nothing, thought less. His one concern now was the chief tottering up above. "Your watch above, you!" His scream was strident, senseless. "Go relieve old Marcey 'fore he croaks and—"

"I will, but use the smoke doors. You don't have to—"

Thoms hove his end of the planks, grabbed Briggs and shoved him to the ladder—"The chief! Go-o-o!" he cried desperately.

Briggs gave it up. Some one here would get his idea. He scaled the ladder like a monkey, gulped clean air and dashed on to the bridge above—to discover two hundred pounds of inert

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flesh in a pile under the throttle. And the throttle was wide open, the screw and shaft roaring! Marcey must have gripped it as he sank, clung desperately and opened it in his slump.

The Grenadier corkscrewed over two cross seas. The seas met, hove high her stern. Her propellor cut loose instantly at a terrific clip. Briggs leaped over Marcey, checked the steam.

His hand barely left the throttle when Marcey, unconscious yet, unfolded with the upward heave of the ship. His head went out over one side of the little, narrow platform. Suddenly the Grenadier's storm-tossed stern side-slipped and dropped deep into a yawning gulf. Marcey's shapeless hulk lurched over the edge, over a chasm . . . huge, rotating journals at the bottom of it. In mere seconds his two hundredweight would slide completely over, hurtle down and grind to pulp.

Briggs grabbed at him, caught his belt. That checked the slide—for the moment. Briggs locked an arm around the nearest pipe rail and braced; slipped on the oily iron underfoot and braced again. Back—his teeth clicked—back in a room that seethed in heat, spun, leaped up, dove deep. And by stubborn degrees Marcey did move toward safety. Then came a tremendous heave. Tons of water were breaking on the after house, squirting into the alleyways. The dinky bridge literally dropped from under those two bodies. It canted, hove Briggs backward—and Marcey on top of him.

Travis Briggs gasped for wind. In his ears the sounds of men passing in the alley outside. Struggling for breath enough, he tried to shout, tried to get out from under Marcey's weight. The pipe irons underneath him pressed grooves into his lean legs; his ribs bent inward. He worked to get free, struggled for his very life—but he never once considered letting Marcey's limp body slide off and plunge below. He was game, game until two men from outside chanced to see his dilemma in passing and came running.

They lifted Marcey off the flattened third assistant, saw with relief that his wind was coming, that he was whole. That was all; they hoisted Marcey and started with him for his room.

But on their way out, Briggs heard one of them growl: "Thoms lost his head. He won't listen to reason. Crawling in over fire . . . sulphur in this lot of coal . . . new, gasketed stoppers right there—steady! Lift his head . . ."

TRAVIS BRIGGS struggled to his feet, swayed . . . those idiots crawling over a fire—after what he'd told Thoms!

Fighting nausea, forcing his flattened muscles, he put for the stokehold. Saw Galvin, caught his eye — and ears: "For God's sake go up and nurse the engine. You can do it!" he cried, watching a pair of burned dungaree legs come slowly out of a firebox, come inching, dragging over steaming canvas on planks.

Galvin went. He had seen Briggs's job on the ash ejector.

Briggs glimpsed the captain in the haze, somewhere beyond Galvin's departing figure. He turned quickly, took in the very thing he had hoped to avoid—it was Gordon coming out for air. His face was scarlet. One arm made a weak attempt to grab at something—he rolled off the planks unconscious. An oiler too big to go inside the furnace made a swipe at him, some one played salt water on his burned

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arms. They lifted him out of the dirty water under foot and headed him for the steward hovering in a corner with his "dopes."

Briggs peered all around him, discerned oilers and stokers, but no Thoms. What had become of the first—

Men were crowding close to the furnace mouth. Briggs wedged himself in. His eye followed the glare of a torch—and made out a sooted heap of humanity. It was away back beyond the planks, beyond the fire. It showed eerily through steam rising off the wet coal that partly smothered the fire. Thoms was down and out, in there, with old-fashioned tube stoppers lying beside him—and those gasketed stoppers that would go in through the smoke doors lay idle out here in the dirty water!

"He must be dead! He looks—"

"Cut the crêpe!" snapped an oiler with a hose nozzle.

All hands stood up uncertainly. Three stokers stared popeyed when the stouter oilers sized them up, scarcely noticing Briggs in the gloom. Three stokers and all three thin enough to crawl into that inferno with a line to start Thoms—what might be left of him—out here. All three, but not one had the nerve after spotting the blisters on Gordon.

Now they recognized Briggs. Would he make them go in there? How? Maybe draw lots? Aha-a! Two sailors were descending the ladder from the engine room . . . two thin men in from fresh air outside—and one was plenty!

"Here comes the next man in," Stoker Sam droned it grimly, somehow made it plain that he himself had no intention of being sacrificed. His watchmates, leaning on their scoops, packed closer around him; that made it unanimous—they hoped.

All hands sized up the newcomers, but nobody said a word. Not yet. The silence was static . . . until somebody turned toward the open furnace.

"That bird!" gasped an oiler, the one who, only two days ago, had told the bosun that the new third engineer was poor as a crow.

Travis Briggs had scarcely considered the sailors. He lay, now, full length on the wet canvas. Already his bony hands were moving into the furnace's maw. He had elected himself to go in after Thoms while the others hesitated. Good old Travis Briggs!

And just before his head went inside: "You oilers clamp onto those gasketed tube stoppers lying in the water," he growled. "Ram them home through the smoke doors, set up the nuts till they bind. Get going!"

His head rolled the other way. "One sailor handle that torch, the other stand by with the nozzle—and don't douse me unless you have to; raises steam off this hot coal; lotta sulphur. Somebody bend that line to my leg. Here goes!"

Inch by inch he crawled. His head vanished, his belt. Now only his toes were outside, already digging into the canvas. Travis Briggs was on his way.

HALF over the smothered fire he got a lungful . . . sulphur dioxide, coal gas! It cut his fast breathing. He stopped, coughed, shook the sweat off his eyes. Then on again.

Presently one dungaree leg smoked. A line of glowing red fire sped for his flesh. The sailor with the nozzle let go a stream of salt water. The red blotted out, but that salt spray sizzled on the coals, seeped down and lifted a cloud of gas-befouled steam. It filled the

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low firebox, filled Briggs's nostrils. Again he coughed, head down, hands and feet gripping at the hot canvas.

Black and red hissing coals at either side. Livid, red-hot dome so close to his shoulders that—*hiss!* His shoulder took that one! Then the smell of scorching hair—and a streak of fire on his scalp! Close quarters . . . just what he had expected, that day he located the gasketed stoppers for Thoms and Gordon. Humph! How still Thoms lay, out there ahead!

Again Briggs shook away sweat to gage the distance he must go. Thirty inches? No, only two feet to that motionless leg by the tube stopper . . . only? It was miles!

Again that booming cross sea. The Grenadier took another crazy, rolling plunge. Briggs sensed it coming, gripped harder. The next he knew, his hand was on Thoms's leg. Almost—almost there. Now he was choking, sipping sweaty salt, spitting cotton. Both arms groping out of the hole into cooler darkness. Then his head . . .

Briggs got to his feet in that black rear chamber. He stood trembling from the ordeal. His eyes grew accustomed to his surroundings, made out water, leaky tubes—and Thoms in a heap at his feet, just as the chief had curled under the throttle.

In time, he trusted his strength to let him examine Thoms. And Thoms wasn't dead! Gordon had come in here, sent one stopper home, gone dizzy and yelled "Help!" Thoms had come while Gordon revived, had driven in one stopper while Gordon crawled out; had picked up another when a lungful of fumes felled him in his tracks—and here he lay. Anyway he was alive.

Briggs removed the line from his own leg, tied Thoms's feet together lest they leave the plank and burn. Next, he tore his shirt into wide, soft strips, wound these over the burned arms, and poked the man feet-first along the planks.

All ready for the trip out, he shouted above the hammering of those oilers plugging the rest of the tubes through the smoke doors, shouted above the slam and boom of the storm, yelled in a hoarse croak that startled the men outside that pathway of hell.

The line tightened promptly. Thoms's feet scraped along the canvas. He lay out straight. His head went last over the fire, under the red-hot dome that radiated terrific, blinding heat waves. Thoms was on his way to safety!

But it wasn't to be so simple. The ship's antics slatted him. His head rocked from side to side. It hung perilously close to the coals. The ship's cursed motions jolted his body four ways, threatened to toss it onto the fire—or heave it up against the blistering dome!

Briggs followed mighty close to that head. His hands struggled to keep it steady. Scalp thumped scalp. His arms wiped the dome, took the burns and defied cremation. Travis Briggs was game. All the bitter, exhausting way out of that hole he was game—and Thoms went out alive. Not once had Briggs let his body take the grief.

And Briggs? Blisters watered on his shoulders. His hair was singed to the scalp, his scalp bleeding, humming. His lungs ached to the cut and bind of fumes that coughing made worse . . . he came into the open muttering, " . . . the tongue can no man tame . . . tongue is a fire . . . a fire!" Indeed!

Men led him to the water bucket, tried to say things about courage and cleverness and iron nerves—all that.

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But their words were clipped and clumsy; it isn't done that way at sea.

Nor would it have mattered, for Briggs was intent upon the job overhead—those stoppers that already were doing the trick, his trick. And while he blinked upward, while men took Thoms, now coming to, off at one side just as Gordon had gone, the master of the Grenadier stood unnoticed out of the way and eyed Briggs until he was satisfied—and infinitely relieved.

THE Grenadier reached Baltimore—eventually.

Travis Briggs viewed the pier gloomily. Forgotten for the moment his painful burns. Back north as far as Baltimore and jobless again; the regular third engineer had rejoined ship here, was already aboard.

Again must come the humiliation of that Boston shipping office; again that "Sure, chief. Come around Tuesday, every Tuesday."

He waited outside until other men were paid off, shrinking bodily from the jostling contact of those fellows eager to be gone. Too, his soul shrank from the moment when he'd be paid and sent ashore to stay—like anything no longer necessary. If only the skipper wouldn't feel obliged to hand out a line about saving Thoms, just let a man take his money and clear out.

But Travis Briggs was not to be granted even that much. Money in hand, he was stepping out over the coaming when Captain Liggett said: "One minute, Briggs; there's a few things I want to say to you."

"Nah, no need of that, cap'n. I—"

Liggett grinned. "Still arguing; eh, Briggs? All the same, I've got something to say and you can argue it afterwards. Now listen: the company has decided to retire Chief Marcey. That means a moving up of our engineers—they've got their papers."

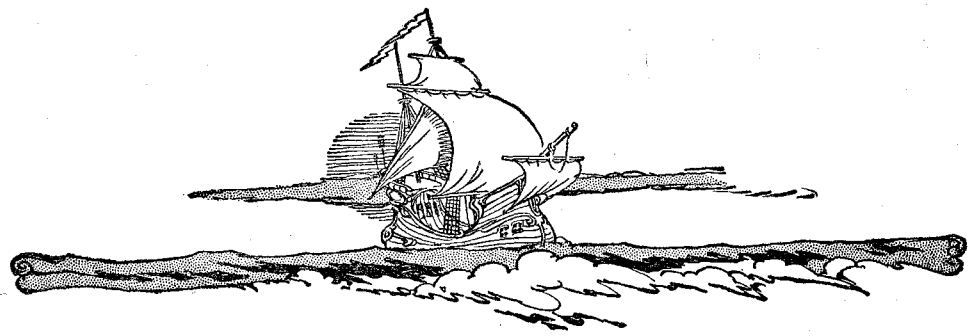
Briggs saw what was coming: Thoms the new, arrogant chief, Gordon first assistant, the regular third going up to second . . . and Liggett was going to "honor" him, Briggs, with the offer of a third assistant's berth!

Briggs trembled with rage; his wounds blazed to the rush of hot blood. He, as chief for any ocean, to be tossed a bone like some mongrel! His mouth opened—closed, softened; that Boston shipping office had flashed into his brain . . . "Every Tuesday."

But Liggett was talking again. " . . . little time ashore, Briggs, to have those burns treated; but when you do come back aboard here, it'll be as our Chief Engineer. Any argument?"

Travis Briggs had no argument.

THE END



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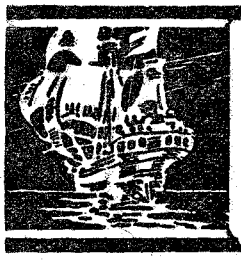

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

NATURE'S refrigerator:

In "Frozen Gold" the explorers are seen eating food that was found in an icebound ship a hundred and fifty years old. At first this seems a a bit fantastic.

Yet the Arctic abounds in equally strange phenomena.

Salomon August Andree, together with Nils Strindberg and Knut Fraenkel, made an ill-fated polar balloon flight in July, 1897. The sealer *Bratvaag* discovered their last camp on White Island, off the coast of Spitzbergen, in August of 1930. The three men had been dead for 33 years, having frozen from lack of adequate clothing, yet between the skeletons of Andree and Fraenkel were found a pan and a plate upon which were remains of their last meal.

Thirty-three years—and food still on a plate! Might that not be extended indefinitely? For in this case there was no protection of any kind. The food lay right out in the open on the beach, as did the diaries and note books. These records were legible, and together with films that were afterwards developed, told the tragic story.

Strindberg's fountain pen was found with shorthand letters he had written to his sweetheart. There was still ink in it. The primus cooking apparatus had fuel in it, and under test boiled a liter of water in six minutes. All this after being exposed to Arctic storms for a third of a century! In a more temperate climate everything would have been destroyed by rust and decay.

Off the northern coast of Alaska—Flaxman Island, I think it was—Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the explorer, ate from the carcass of a whale that had been dead three years. He said it was perfectly good.

If a man stays in the far north any length of time he will eventually find himself in a spot where he has to eat some funny things, I know I have, but those scientists who partook of mastodon meat thousands of years old win all prizes. That food has been preserved in Nature's great refrigerator for countless centuries!

JACK ALLMAN.

GUESS *Hashknife* and *Irish* and the rest don't pay much income tax!

Summerville, Pa.

I have never kicked before, but I am going to do it now. ARGOSY surely struck a rock when she hit George Challis if his "Naked Blade" novel is a sample of what he writes.

W. C. Tuttle stories are fairly good, but his heroes always go away without taking pay of any kind. How do they pay their hotel bill, or are they always rich, but don't show it?

I like the new departments ARGOSY has added, "Stranger Than Fiction" and "Astrology Readings." Here's hoping ARGOSY hits no other rocks.

THEODORE HECKMAN.

A MARINE tells it to us:

Memphis, Tenn.

I don't remember ever seeing a letter from "Memphis on the Mississippi" in your magazine, and it is possible that this one may go in the waste basket, but I want to tell you to keep up the good work. I have been a constant reader of your magazine since 1913 when I was serving in the U. S. Marines, at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. My favorite authors are Max Brand and H. Bedford-Jones. "The Red Pacer," by Geo. O. Baxter, and "Sabotage," by Fred MacIsaac, are great. Also liked "Dead Man's Answer," by T. Roscoe, and "The Sin Ship."

T. L. CAMPBELL.

'WAY down South they know what's good, suh:

Selma, Ala.

It is very seldom that your "Argonotes" contain a letter of any kind from "'way down South." One would almost think that ARGOSY was not properly appreciated in this section. Such is not the case; ARGOSY has just as many fans here as anywhere.

H. Bedford-Jones is an excellent author. Theodore Roscoe's stories are always good. I think interplanetary stories are least interesting of all.

L. L. EDWARDS.

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GOOD to the last minute:

Birmingham, Mich.

I applaud Max Brand on his wonderful work, "The White Indian." I hope to see more of his stories.

Your "True Stories in Pictures" are very interesting and I never miss one of them.

"The Red Pacer," by George Owen Baxter, is a wonderful, exciting story. I read it to the children and they were held spellbound to the last minute. MRS. R. D. HOWELL.

HE stirred up something, all right:

New Orleans, La.

Well—well—well, take this feller Anderson Clark, fer instance—thet earned his buck in yer Feb. 24th issue; now there's a feller thet jes natcherly ain't got no business burying his self away off there in MOUNDville. He's jes too durn smart, thet's all there be to et. Mr. Editer, there's one feller thet jes natcherly should oughter be in yer shoes. 'Pears ter me he knows all there be ter know 'bout runnin' the ARGOSY, an' 'bout what the rest uv us poor fellers should read. 'Course far be ut from me to object to his objection to the "Men of Daring" an' "Stranger Than Fiction" departiments, but the fact do remain thet to us dum fellers, them two departiments do be a source uv information, information thet be both amusing an' eddyfying. Ye see—unlike this objecting feller, the rest uv us have as yet got a hull lot tu learn. I find there still be a right smart lot of things in this here world thet I ain't seen nor ever heared 'bout. Oh, well! Yo-hum an' lack-a-day, I s'pose we all have our kicks in the pants, an' magazine editers ain't no exception. Talking 'bout critisicm—I want to do a bit of critiking, too—'bout this feller W. C. Tuttle an' his yarn, "Buckshot." Didja know this feller has a sense of humor? Gosh-all-hemlock, who ever heared of humor in any of the ARGOSY stories? PAW MEADERS.

Dowagiac, Mich.

The reason for this outburst is a combination of a big story and a big pain in the neck, both in the same issue. Why doesn't this Anderson Clarke, who had his blurb in "Argonotes," buy himself a publishing company and print a magazine to suit his own exalted taste?

To get back to solid ground again, the story that struck me as great was Murray Leinster's "War of the Purple Gas." I am a fantastic fan, and that story is right down my alley.

CHAS. F. JARVIS.

Looking Ahead!

The Prophet of Death

Time and again men died—on the very dates named by the mysterious "Prophet of Death"—rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief. How did he do it? What was his purpose? An amazing mystery novel, complete.

By Allan Vaughan Elston

Fence-Top Duel

Of all sports, cross-country steeple-chasing is one of the most spectacular. And the riders in this race knew that a secret menace stalked them! A novelette.

By Judson P. Philips

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—MAY 5

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Your Horoscope

Those who ordered horoscope readings from Miss Carter will find the first sections explained below. A complete series, including all your own planetary positions, will appear in this and the next seven or eight issues of ARGOSY, for the benefit of those who may have missed any of these sections when previously published.

Miss Carter claims no ability to tell fortunes, forecast the future, or solve present problems, and these readings are not intended for any such purpose.

Section 202. Moon.

ASTROLOGERS consider that this planetary position is one which imparts a tendency toward obstinacy and a great deal of tenacity. As a result of having come into the world at a time when it was operating strongly, you are inclined to be extremely obstinate when directly opposed. That quality is greatly augmented when you are opposed in any manner suggestive of an attempt to dominate or force your compliance. The influence of this vibration would have made you less forgiving and disinclined to overlook a slight or injury. It would have made you more kind-hearted, however, unless you are prejudiced. It is considered an excellent position for the achievement of ambition as it imparts singleness of purpose and the ability to concentrate on one objective to the exclusion of everything else. Its influence made you much more steady, purposeful and relentless than would have been the case had it not been operating when you came into the world. The probabilities are that your senses of taste and touch are more highly developed and of more importance to you than the other three.

Section 289. Neptune.

PEOPLE who were born under this planetary vibration are much more likely to be psychic than would have been the case had this influence not existed at the time of their birth. The position does not have great effect upon the average man, but is more than likely to add force to the man who is out of the ordinary. As a result of having been born under this influence you are more receptive to psychic influences, but if your interests are wholly material it is not likely to have a noticeable effect upon your life. The influence of the planet is of a spiritual and occult nature, according to astrology, and would make you much more capable of understanding things of an occult nature than you would have been—if your spiritual qualities are developed it will lend great force to your contacts with people in general.

Section 242. Mars.

ASTROLOGERS consider that this is a planetary position which bears testimony to the fact that the individual affected will, during early life, experience some obstacles to the realization of ambition. It is considered a good position for the general health, increasing resistance to disease and imparting splendid vitality. It is a vibration which makes one a good worker, but it usually lessens any desire the individual might otherwise have, to go into a personally controlled business. Unless other planetary positions in your chart are of an opposite nature, you are more likely to work under supervision than entirely on your own responsibility. It is not a planetary vibration which imparts great warmth and passion. The probabilities are that you are not highly emotional. On the other hand, it is very likely that you have a strong will and as a result are not often led astray by the emotional side of your nature. Astrologers have always considered that this is a strong testimony pointing to the fact that later years of life will be quite peaceful and contented.

Section 290. Uranus.

THE planetary influence considered here is one which would have made you much more honest, downright and constructive than you would have been had you not come into the world at a time when it was in operation. It is a position which is considered very fortunate in many respects. The sign in which the planet considered in this section was, is one which has always been associated by astrologers with steady, persistent, constructive effort. It is a sign which produces practical builders and those who are able to carry out the plans of others with great faithfulness. That does not mean that you are wholly practical as other planetary positions in your chart must be considered. However, as a result of this influence you are much more steady, patient and determined than would have been the case without it. A number of empire builders and outstanding men and women in other walks of life were born within the scope of this influence. Among them were Napoleon, Cecil Rhodes and Wilhelm II. Dante was also born under this planetary vibration.

Section 245. Mars.

HAVING been born at a time when this planetary influence was operating strongly, you are much more frank, outspoken and honest than you would have been without its effect. The position is one which imparts very positive qualities. The sign and planet are in accord to a considerable degree, yet the planet is considered to be one which imparts impulsiveness in speech and action, sometimes to an excessive degree. The sign being also of the same nature, you are much more impulsive, impatient of restraint and hasty than you would have been without its influence. If these tendencies are in evidence they should be restrained by all means, because the strength of this vibration is such as to cause them to grow into proportions which might readily lead you into difficulties. It is not at all unlikely that this influence would bring about a great deal of travel at some time during your life and quite possibly adventure. Astrologers have considered for centuries that it is a strong testimony pointing in that direction. It is considered to be an indication of unusual experience during later years.

Section 210. Moon.

THIS influence makes you prudent, economical and generally thrifty. The position improves the mental qualities, and it imparts a longing for fame in the majority of people born under it. Both the moon and the sign are considered negative, passive and coldly intellectual in their vibratory effects, consequently they tend to make you more coldly intellectual and unsympathetic than you would have been. A great many people who come into the world under this vibration are conservative toward new ideas and somewhat inclined to resent changes of method in their business activities, or even in their surroundings generally. Unless born in a birth period which is enthusiastic and venturesome in its influence, your response to impressions is rapid and frequently antagonistic.

Section 291. Uranus.

ASTROLOGERS have always considered that the planetary position which this section considers is one which has a tendency to lessen the driving force of the will. When one was born under a strong, aggressive birth sign and at a time when other planetary positions were also aggressive in their influence, the effect is not apparent. You are possessed of ample power of will to enable you to overcome obstacles which you encounter, yet the influence of this planetary position would have lessened your selfishness in the carrying out of material, personal plans. Those born under this influence, unless very highly developed spiritually, are usually less forceful although they usually do not realize why they hesitate to impose their will on others. Those born under this vibration who are highly developed spiritually have the power to become great religious leaders. As a result of having come into the world under this planetary influence you are much more likely to "turn the other cheek" than you would have been without it.

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